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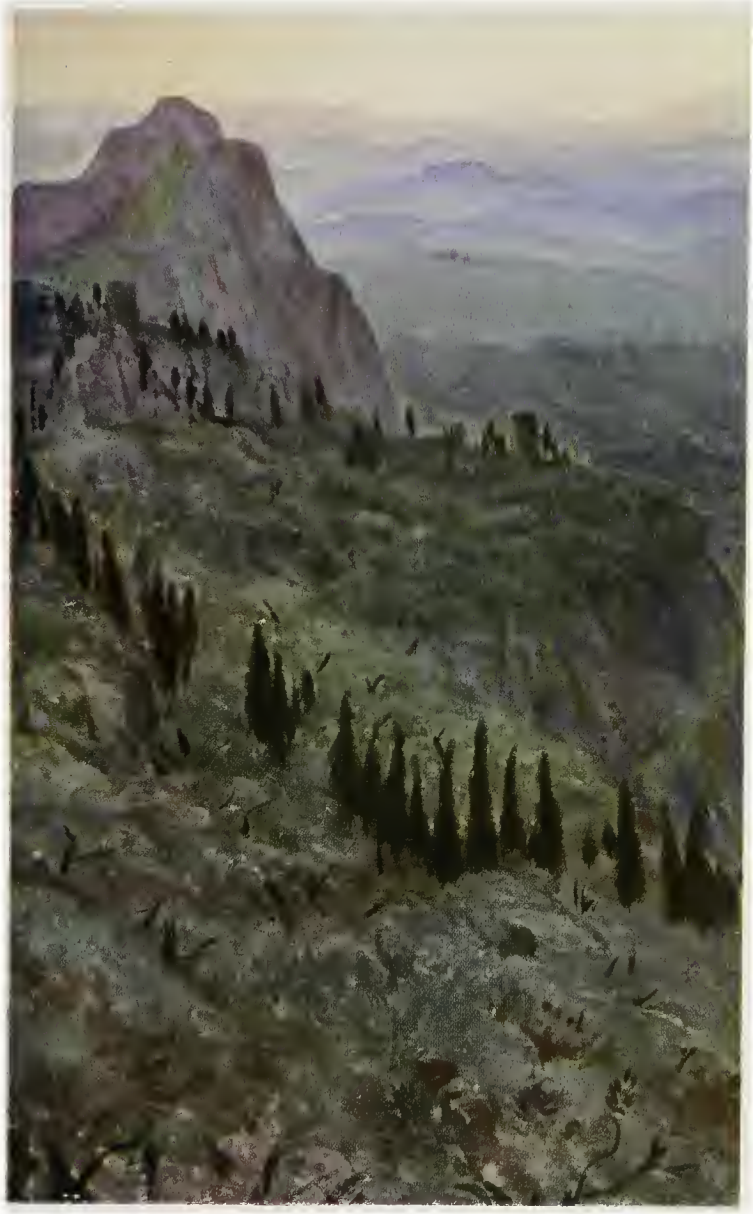

THE PLAIN OF UMBRIA

(*By permission of Sir Charles Walston*)

Frontispiece

ASSISI

IMPRESSIONS OF HALF A CENTURY

BY

SIR WILLIAM B. RICHMOND
K.C.B., R.A.

With Illustrations in Colour from Original Paintings and Sketches by the Author

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CHAPTER I

RETROSPECTIVE, 1868

THE winter of 1867 was a memorable one in Rome. The atmosphere was charged with apprehension, insecurity, and intense political animosity. The emancipation of Rome from the unwise and tyrannical rule of the Vatican had temporarily miscarried. French troops were back in Rome to protect the tottering temporal power of the Pope King, which every one, even the Vatican, knew was doomed to fall sooner or later. The Republican and the Italian parties united to attempt a revolution, less well prepared than that of 1848, but quite as sincere, and more likely to prove successful, for Italy had acquired in the intervening years the Kingdom of Naples, the Island of Sicily, and the greater portion of the peninsula.

But Rome remained outside Italian unity and entirely adverse to it. Mentana had been fought and lost. Chivalrous patriots had been exiled and their estates confiscated. Men whom one had met daily were no longer to be seen in Rome. After Mentana those who could do so had to flee, those who could not do so became prisoners, some were heard of no more, others reappeared in the Eternal City in September 1870, when the Italians rushed the Porta Pia, scattered the papal troops, and took possession of the Campedoglio.

The first to arrive there, and for forty-eight hours to be Governor of Rome, was Giovanni Costa, my close and dear friend, whose purse, at one time well supplied, was at the disposal of the pioneers of Liberty, and whose art had something of classical nobility about it, reflecting a big and heroic temperament. Of Giovanni Costa Lord Leighton said, "He is a painter in a hundred and a man in a thousand." To Giovanni Costa I owe my introduction to the *Fioretti* of St. Francis, which enchanting book first inspired me with a desire to visit the ancient city of Assisi in Umbria, the birthplace of at least two men and one woman who have left their names writ strong upon the intellects and emotions of the human race—Propertius the Latin poet, St. Francis the poet of Poverty, and Sta. Chiara his faithful follower, —the founder of the Society of the Poor Clares, which now, 700 years after its initiation, is a living force for charity and devotion to the needs of the sick and suffering, not only in Italy but extended to the four corners of the globe, a permanent power for good. Costa had taken refuge in Florence. By the aid of his friends, and the energy of Joseph Severn, the friend of Keats as well as his constant and devoted nurse, who closed the poet's eyes when he left a world which had not been too kind to him, Costa's estate was saved from perquisition, and his studio, together with his pictures and valuables, was protected from falling into the hands of the Vatican by the stalwart arms of England which were set over its door in the Via Margutta, an entirely unconstitutional act on the part of a British Consul, I believe.

Nor must I forget another friend who urged me to Assisi, and told me where to find lodgment, and whose knowledge of Italy was considerable. William Davies, the friend of Rossetti, was a man of wide cultivation ; he had a charming gift for Art besides being a skilful man of letters. Davies' pencil drawings made in various

parts of Central Italy were quite the best things of their kind I remember to have seen done at that time. An elegant scholar, William Davies published several books which received considerable notice. One, perhaps the most important, he wrote in conjunction with Mr. Hemans: it was illustrated by the late Edgar Barclay, and gave an account of a journey from the mouth to the source of the Tiber. It is a book which no English traveller in Italy should be without. Davies had passed a summer in Assisi, and knew all the ropes. It was important for us to be lodged in comfort if not in luxury, for I had taken unto myself a wife some months before. In those days country inns in Italy were often the reverse of desirable. They had become neglected, were dirty, expensive, and entirely insanitary, and indeed were very little used by foreigners since the arrival of railroads, which take only the well-trodden ways. In the days of the diligence, the road-side hostels and those in small towns were far cleaner and better appointed than they came to be twenty years after the railways had succeeded the diligence. Notwithstanding some uncertainty which called for solution, whether it would be wise to take a delicate young lady to an out-of-the-way little town in the height of summer, the strained condition of things political and social in Rome, and an atmosphere of unrest extremely antagonistic to serious work, decided us to leave Rome, and we determined to take the risk, go to the little city in the hills, and abide by the consequences of such apparent rashness. During June Rome had been the victim of constant thunderstorms, and the air was charged with electricity, moral and physical. But stormy, wild, even tempestuous weather brings out all the grandeur of the Roman Campagna and accentuates its noble desolation, and thither I went on foot daily to walk, wander, and paint, accompanied by my faithful servant Giovanni Margiotto, whose ever-

friendly but stern control over me was exercised in making me rise early, an authority to which I bowed consent, and for which I thank him now. Often we would leave Rome at five in the morning, making our way along the Via Flaminia, cutting across to the Cork Woods, and returning late to Rome by the Porta Solara, just in time before the gates were closed for the night. Often we were wet to the skin ; but I was fully recompensed by the delight which the ever-changing and magnificent skies provided, skies the like of which are to be seen nowhere else that I know of in such perfection as these are, in *scirocco* weather, in that most solemn epic land, the Campagna of Rome.

After an unsettled period I was in the mood to go to find more peace, to come in contact with less strenuous conditions than Rome and the intense pathos the Campagna communicated, so that the idea of the little Umbrian town girt about with walls upon the slopes of M. Subasio became to be more and more engaging : and upon a hot afternoon at the end of June the very slow train was sleepily grinding its way into Umbria, and, after a six hours' journey upon a night enriched by brilliant starlight, we arrived at the little station of Assisi, the same station which stands there now, unchanged, unrepaired, I don't believe even repainted, during forty-six years. And I verily believe that it was the same creaky, jolting, square omnibus, a kind of box upon moaning wheels, which took us up the steep hill from Santa Maria degli Angeli, in which I deposited myself less than a year ago to make the same little journey. A traveller has to become used to his environment and accustomed to eccentric deviations from convention, and it is surprising how soon prospects by no means attractive may become more than endurable, even delightful. The hostel at the gate of which the driver of the little square box on wheels set us down, went by

THE CHURCH AND MONASTERY OF ST. FRANCIS, ASSISI, FROM THE GORGE

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the dignified name of "Leone d' Oro." There it stands yet, in the Piazza Vescovado, but it is no longer an inn. The Leone d' Oro is a seventeenth-century house, tradition says erected for a rich and none too scrupulous cardinal. I need hardly say that accommodation was primitive—it might almost claim to be a negligible quantity—and I certainly need not add that the host and hostess were homely people, anxious to please, even if ignorant of foreign ways and needs, hence in some respects unable to do so, simply because the means of comfort, even of obtaining ordinarily good food, were exceedingly scanty. The meat presented a texture of elephant hide, which only the teeth of prehistoric man could penetrate. The chickens, poor little things, were probably upon the verge of starvation when their thin little necks were wrung. Butter was not a luxury; it bore strong resemblance to train-oil in colour and flavour. One matter of food was excellent, the bread, hard, dark, whole meal; and the wine with which to soften it was more than excellent, delicious and wholesome. Such wine as is now very difficult to get in Assisi, where adulteration, as well as other trade vices of what is called civilization, has become a commercial habit, against which there is no redress, either through public opinion or active legislation. It was well to remember, occasionally, when one lay down to rest, that St. Francis was content with, aye even he blessed, the rough stone on which he lay, and the block of wood which gave support to his weary head. The beds of the Leone d' Oro were apparently stuffed with straw and potatoes, with a little salad of the husks of maize: shake them, beat them, jump upon them, no permanent softness or elasticity resulted. One's body lay among lumps, and here and there a chance wisp of straw, penetrating from its proper place, would cause extreme temporary disquietude.

Nor were the sheets made of fine linen, but of good strong corded cotton, rough and rasping as sand-paper. But to these small drawbacks the contented mind became reconciled, and if the body—that tiresome, exacting, and hypersensitive part of the over-luxurious modern man—did not soon applaud the inroads upon its comfort, it at least became reconciled to, and in time hardened by, the inevitable.

It has always been a maxim of mine that the traveller who is tempted to grumble should arrest his grumbling by exaggeration in any other direction. When an egg is not quite fresh, he should say to himself, and perhaps out loud if a grumbling friend is handy, "This is a delicious egg." The grumbling friend will no doubt look astonished as he tastes a similar egg, but the good-humour with which the statement has been made, even though it be an inaccurate and exaggerated one, will subdue the grumbler to a tone, if not of acquiescence, at least of resignation. In the *salotto* there was a sofa which I shall never forget, and an arm-chair also, whose legs came off under the least provocation. The only way to enlist comparative rest upon the sofa was to lie far back upon it, and to press oneself against the insecure back of it, and thus to avoid rolling off its rounded surface on to the uncarpeted tile-laid floor. And yet upon that miserable sofa and upon that dangerous, erratic, untrustworthy chair many pleasant hours of reading were enjoyed, when the mind became too sweetly occupied to enlarge upon the undesirable construction of articles which, I suppose, *were*, somehow or other originally, if with absolute futility, designed and constructed to provide for some extremely remote idea of comfort.

Being somewhat indifferent to dirt, and not over-friendly to indoor sanitation, the Italian housekeeper permits dust of all kinds to remain unchecked, thus providing convenient nests and

breeding-places for highly organized insects. With the very best intentions, the worthy hostess would very gently attempt to pacify our prejudice against matter in the wrong place by sweeping undesirable substances from the centre of the rooms into a corner and there leaving them to shelter whatever germs they contained. And not without some ostentation was this act performed, for it was not a customary one, neither was it a ritual which was suggested, much less demanded, by ordinary visitors to the hostel. It was done to please the Inglese, who are so particular, and as far as the good lady had a light in her mind upon such matters, she shed it well but perfunctorily. But as to the suggestion that to remove the dust from the corners might be desirable, that was more than the good lady's mind could grasp. It was an idea quite beyond the reach of her anticipation and power to digest. Hence there became, and there grew in quantity, very convenient domiciles and resorts for certain agile insects for whom I have some respect, because I believe their power of leaving and arriving commands a greater space in distance than any other animal or insect within the range of created things is able to accomplish at one bound. And these gay little fellows were indeed plentiful at all hours of the day and night in the city of St. Francis. Science has provided the modern exacting man with certain prohibitions against invasion, which are said to defy or at least to retard, the militant advances of these clever little acrobats, but my experience is to exert and extend one's patience, and on this and similar occasions of discomfort to designate the insect as "a brother" and thereby, and especially in Assisi, to enter into the serene, gentle, and entirely healthy state of the Franciscan order—to accept what we cannot help, and fraternize with discomfort.

Leaving these elemental or chastening influences, I would

for a moment turn to the specimens of the human species into whose hands we had resigned ourselves, and to whom we were beholden either for comfort or the reverse. The host, one Serafino Stoppini, was a huge, rough man, whose bark was loud, though his bite somewhat toothless, and like all blusterers he was not overwhelmed with courage, rather the reverse. His language, which was not choice, was ornamented or degraded, according to likes and dislikes, by a very rich interlacement of oaths which are unhappily part of the vernacular of certain town-bred individuals in Umbria, though far less are they in use among the *contadini.* There is only one part of Italy where swear-words are more expressive and loathsome than those in common use in Umbrian towns; the Genoese dialect contains whole sentences of cleverly-strung oaths, revolting as well as blasphemous. Anyway Serafino was a master in the Umbrians' art of bad language. And yet the rough fellow, shrewd as he was and entirely wrapped up in his own advantages, had a good heart somewhere hidden under a manner and appearance which can only be described as "brutal." With all his objectionable manners, so simple a fellow was he, and so highly did he estimate the qualities, facilities, and comforts which his hotel afforded, that one day he said to me quite seriously, "In England there can be no hotel like the Leone d' Oro, there can be no house in that far-off barbarous country, which is not Christian,[1] to approach my hotel for comfort, propriety, and luxury": at which question—hardly a question, but a statement—I answered, "Assuredly I have never been in any Hotel in England, France, or Italy to be compared for a moment with the Leone d' Oro," which answer he took to be a compliment, and in an impulse of amazing egotism and

[1] A *contadina* from Subiaco went with me into the English church at Rome. She looked about in vain for her Madonna; failing to find her, she spied the lectern made in the shape of an eagle. "Ah," she said, "now I know you English worship the eagle instead of Madonna."

superlative ignorance, in a loud voice he reproduced my statement to his friends all through the town. So it became known that the Englishman had said that in no civilized portion of the world was there a single hotel to be found which combined all the satisfactory component parts of a perfect hotel with such consummation as Serafino Stoppini's Leone d' Oro in Assisi. It came to pass that suddenly, no one said why or wherefore, though the good lady gossip gave various reasons which were far from creditable, Serafino Stoppini began to build, to add to his grand hotel, that it might be grander, and without any doubt become the first in all Europe. Up in the monastery, near the church, tongues wagged very freely, and what was said was repeated to me by a well-nourished sacristan, a certain lay brother Fra Giovanni, with a genius for news and a sharp tongue to convey it, a great snuff-taker and afterwards a friend and admirer of John Ruskin during his visits to Assisi of a considerably later date than this one of mine.

To repeat the gossip would serve no purpose, if what was said be true. Serafino is dead, and we hope at rest. If it was false, so much the better. But the fact was, Serafino began to build, to decorate and otherwise embellish his house. So a house-painter was called in, in the shape of a youth of some twenty-two years, a little younger than I. A great desire came to me to paint upon a wall. The works of Cimabue and Giotto looked so simple, so easily done—to my untutored energy everything seemed so easy in those days. I suppose all really great art appears to have been done with ease, it is the dexterous "clever" art which looks impossible to emulate. Well, the painter lad was possessed of the most execrable taste, common at that time in Italy, and not uncommon now, *vide* Futurists, and though taking another turn, taste is now quite as execrable as it was

and perhaps more pernicious and corrupt. But this lad was a first-rate craftsman. He knew his trade. I had read the old treatise upon painting by Cennino Cennini. This boy was putting it into practice. He had all the traditions of the Giotto School in practical use, though he had not read a single word about them, for the simple reason that he read with difficulty, and was not within the range of learned books. This fellow, who was quite intelligent (I forget his name), taught me the main principles of tempera painting, which I applied upon the ceiling in an upper room of the Leone d' Oro. The result is interesting, and in a measure instructive, because the tempera picture, which presented Somnus presiding over dreams, after forty-six years is in as perfect preservation as when it left my hands. Perhaps a cynic might say, "The more the pity." I daresay it may be so, for of its value as a work of art I am no judge. The lesson the painting conveys is that tradition *is* necessary for the artist if it be only applied to technicalities of his art. I wonder how many Futurist daubs will be visible at all forty-six years hence; of them I am a judge anyhow,—of their demerits, for I see no merits,—and I hope that as the plague, cholera, and other scourges are rooted out of civilization by science, good sense (for some surely still resides in a restless, impulsive, and inartistic period) will ere long boycott the various follies which at present profane the Temple of The Arts.

Meanwhile Serafino made progress with his building, gossip proceeded, and the excellent wife lamented in subdued if pathetic terms the large sums of money which were being employed upon bricks and mortar. Signora Stoppini belonged to a type of woman not by any means uncommon in the class just above the peasant class in Italy, and especially in Umbria. She was a distinguished and very beautiful lady. Her countenance is to

be seen among the mothers upon the vault of the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo delighted in the Etruscan type of womanhood. It is a big and noble type, strong and accentuated surely, but gentle and lovable also. It is to be seen to-day in Trastevere, where the Etruscan race seems to have settled, apart from Rome, so often and so seriously its bitter enemy. Signora Stoppini belonged to that noble Etruscan model. Of education she had little, of grace of manner she had much, and her beautiful exterior was answered in a heart of gold. The great traditions of her race inadvertently and unconsciously centred round her every thought and action. Learned in herbs, she was an excellent physician. Her gentle and noble demeanour kept order among riotous elements which sometimes threatened to destroy the peace of her domestic life. Her tranquil manner stayed many a coming brawl, and never was anger permitted to impair her classic dignity of demeanour. Under a deliberate reserve, which circumstances dictated, there reigned a womanly and gentle warmth which commanded respectful affection and enlisted unfailing confidence. She was much tried, but never a complaint passed her lips. She was made in the mould of St. Catherine of Siena and of Santa Chiara. She ruled by strength and sweetness, qualities which, in accord, subdue riot, promote concord, and are often allied in the temperament of Etruscan women. Hence their high reputation as mothers, their exalted place as wives, and the respect they have received from history. It has been my luck to come across in Italy several women of this noble genus, which forms the backbone of an impulsive people, and a steadying moral element among temperaments which only too easily might break through all restraint. I have dwelt upon the memory of this gracious lady, for reasons which I cannot forget during a time of anxiety in a country which would indeed have been a strange one but for her

ministration. The whole work of the hotel was done by mother and two daughters, one named Caterina, a pretty girl who afterwards married a distinguished Spanish painter and became, I believe, a great lady in the Iberian continent.

The only man employed in the Leone d' Oro was an old fellow whom we christened Il Vecchio, an individual who could not distinguish between *meum* and *tuum*, but whose unfailing good nature and quick sense of humour prompted forgiveness upon every occasion when integrity had temporarily failed to minister to his elastic morals. Some little episodes touching upon his lapses in his own favour will presently be told.

The only Englishman in the place, I was treated with perfect good-fellowship, even it now and again I was, not ill-naturedly, misled regarding the value of objects for sale. The market-place fascinated me, and upon market-days an irresistible impulse prompted me to mingle with the people, to enjoy the unusual scene, and perhaps to purchase. On these days the huge grey and white oxen with the mild eyes peculiar to their breed were segregated in rough pens. The varieties of greys, dove colour, and white of these beautiful beasts formed a salient contrast with the glowing tints of various fruits ; the brilliant tomato, the deep-toned plum, the exciting and stimulating flashes of orange from melons and gourds, were varied with the yellow and green of ripe and unripe lemons—with these and other delightful tints, in glorious disorder, the red stone pavement of the piazza was strewn. Figs in abundance there were always—those pale golden little fellows, each with the diamond drop of the sweetest juice upon his crown, and the solemn purple of the later and larger figs, lying upon their great green leaves, whose shape is so severe, so varied, and yet so monumental, and whose scent seems to take one back in imagination to some Bacchic festival in far-off times. These,

and the more commonplace varieties of green growth, collectively so beautiful, scattered among piles of potatoes, whose dust colour always has a great fascination for me, again formed a delicious contrast in colour and texture with hardware of peasant manufacture, tinted barbarically with blacks and reds running into amber and white, and lying in unselected groups. Glittering in brilliant sunlight, their glazed surfaces conveyed an impression of pieces of an old stained-glass mosaic window scattered over the pavement.

Otherwise, colour was already getting rarer than before the coming of the railway, even in far-off Assisi, for the peasant costumes were giving way before the uninviting and commonplace fashion in dress of northern invention, not a bit more utilitarian than the older, but ugly and monotonous. Alas, even Manchester cotton goods were appearing, but the crude and vulgar dyes inharmoniously disposed were soon brought into some harmony by the forcible bleaching of an Italian sun, and unstable dyes got washed out into some distinction of tone by heavy summer rains, the like of which we know little in England. There is this to be said in defence of crude colour, that it is far less offensive in a sunlit climate than under our heavy grey muddy skies. Sunlight produces harmony because, the light being so powerful, every shadow is coloured ; thus reflected light is strong, hence colour is reflected into adjacent surfaces, and becomes harmonized in this way owing to the intensity of light which travels over and among every surface. In the motley crowd of this weekly gathering, people passed to and fro, buying, gossiping, arguing, and tale-telling, while the one chemist's shop was ever filled with patients seeking the aid of the chemist, who in those days was the chief physician of the town. There was not a malady he could not cure, so he said, with a great assortment of simples and drugs, and drastic indeed were often the remedies, but well suited to a healthy and

hardened people. A little room of his shop was set apart for the process of bleeding, a cure which the Italians have very wisely not, even now, wholly given up. Small operations were also performed, for the chemist was surgeon and physician in one person.

Assisi was still the home of many monks, priests, and nuns. The Vatican influence still held, for though the monasteries had been suppressed technically and upon paper, there remained a goodly number of the Franciscan brotherhoods and sisterhoods that have worked so charitably and so persistently through evil as well as good times. The market-day provided a busy time for the begging friars who went on "quest," and the Poor Clares asked for alms for the poor in the name of Mary. Never did the sacks which they brought from convents and monasteries upon the backs of mules return empty, more often were they full to overflowing. It was rare then to hear the begging friars dismissed with an oath or denied some little offering. Poor as the folk were, and are still, the spirit of Francis and his illustrious life and influence upon the people of his native town, if it did not always secure love, even sometimes inspiring distrust, yet kept alive in the imagination the presence of the saint who could still grant the great *perdono* at his festival in August, and provoked an agitation of credulity, a kind of fear lest he should be displeased at a denial to relieve the wants of his little followers.

The Catholic faith is very strong in the little province of Assisi ; credulity has not been conquered by liberalism. It is true that the Assisans like liberty—they always have done so—and now there is a socialist union which may work for good in some directions, but even this advanced movement, a movement not so modern in Italy as foreigners imagine, being in fact an ancient counterbalance, has not alienated pride in the fact that their city was the birthplace of the greatest of Italian saints,

and one whom they claim to have been the mediæval socialist. So the socialists are drawn to St. Francis. They claim him as the pioneer of their creed, and as the reviver of the spirit of brotherhood which his master, Jesus Christ, initiated in Palestine. So here on market-day every one rubbed shoulders, the priest and the socialist even. So nearly allied are old and more recent customs that the brilliant scene which I have attempted in a few words to suggest to the imagination, or at least one which in essentials was doubtless similar, may have been witnessed by the Latin poet Propertius, whose dwelling-place, tradition tells us, was hard by the Temple of Minerva. Probably the present piazza was once the Forum of Asisium ; if so, the Roman crowd met on festival days for the same purposes as the modern crowd meets to-day, to do business.

It was to see the Temple of Minerva and the possible birthplace of Propertius that Goethe paid a passing visit to Assisi, but there is no record of his having stayed a night there. In the eighteenth century the sham classic was in high fashion, and so hide-bound were its followers, and so chained by prejudice to exercises in proportion, that they turned a blind eye to the real classic with which such temples as the Church of St. Francis is far more in harmony than the five Roman columns which represent what is left of the Temple to Minerva. *Faust* is surely an extraordinary human document, so in another way is the story of Francis. It seems strange that the poet who conceived so great a human tragedy should have been content with a view of a few cold Roman stones, when hard by in the Church of St. Francis the touching life of the greatest of Christian saints, recorded by one of the most powerful of all Italian artists appears to have commanded no interest, not even curiosity, for Goethe, who did not even pay a tourist's visit to the most important shrine

of Christian art in Italy. Fashions influence even great minds, if only indirectly and unconsciously. While great keenness is exercising the mind in one direction, there seems to be little room for the entry of other interests for the time being of another kind, or such as are influenced by another motive. Perhaps it is not strange, then, but natural, admitting the pedantic classical outlook upon art and literature which characterized the most intelligent minds of the eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth century, that the Romantic enthusiasm, the fervid effort to reach out towards an extended ideal, to return to strong emotions partaking of an intense human devotion, which inspired the renaissance of Christ's teaching in the person of Francis, made no appeal to a theoretically trained mind like Goethe's, so scientific and purposeful; and yet *Faust* surely, as a romantic play, is in nearer kinship with the glorification of pure love and charity, so essentially the keynote of Francis' teaching, than much of the literature of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. When I was in Assisi for the first time, so recently by comparison with the visit of Goethe, the cult of St. Francis had not been started, nor were the Italian primitive artists regarded with fervour. Their works were looked upon with curiosity more than affection, and I, trained in the school of the great masters of a later period and up to Reynolds, am bound to acknowledge that I found at first greater pleasure in Rome, that is to say, among the marbles of the Vatican, in the *Stanze* of Raphael, and in the later Italico-Greco vases, than I could summon in the company of Cimabue and Giotto. Yet I infinitely preferred the living poetry in the architecture of the upper Church of St. Francis to what seemed to me the dead archæology and wearisome mannerisms of the cold Roman design which Goethe came to worship.

The interest in Assisi as a Roman town had been swept

LA ROCCA, FROM THE DOOR OF THE UPPER CHURCH, ASSISI

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away by its being the scene of self-conquest, self-denial, in a character which commands love from every human being. And further, in such beautiful country, among such stimulating scenes, which appealed more directly as well as more vividly to my energies than Roman or Umbrian archæology, it appeared to me waste of opportunities to bask only in the atmosphere of the past, to permit no radiations from the light shed upon the world, existing for me as it existed for my predecessors, and which unquestionably did inspire them, to illumine me, to give me fresh sight, the sight of my own eyes dwelling upon skies, mountains, plains, and all the magical varieties of the various beauties they contain, suggest, and inspire. And there came a great longing to ride about the hills, to visit those engaging towered cities opposite, to dive down into the plain, and to experience the country, not only to look at it and long for it at a distance. This desire suddenly gave way to an impulse. One day, attending the Fair, I saw a young horse, scarcely broken, which took my fancy. He was being very cleverly ridden barebacked upon the green at the back of San Rufino. I tried him too, and the joy of being again across a horse overstepped all prudence, so with no further examination of the Rosinante, I bought him there and then for eighty francs. Proud of my purchase, I rode him down to the Leone d' Oro, to be received there with sundry not very complimentary comments upon my knowledge of horse-flesh. Serafino and Il Vecchio declared my nag to be "*un gobbo*," a hunchback, which in a measure was true. He had not a straight back, he had a bad temper and strong legs, but he turned out a useful hack, and took me about the country—to Perugia, Spoleto, Foligno—quite well enough, but "*gobbo*" stuck to him. "Give a dog," etc., applied here. Finally I sold him to a horse-dealer in Rome, one Ranucci, who was an ardent republican, in whose stables many a score

of arms had been concealed, to be used in 1867 in the short campaign which ended in Mentana. It was Il Gobbo that caused some conflict of opinion between Il Vecchio and myself. I bought and paid for oats and hay. It seemed to Il Vecchio that he might just as well employ my fodder to provide a little more flesh for the miserable animal that drew the box on four wheels called an omnibus. I did not see the matter quite in his light, and I fear that in my equitable annoyance at his defection from conventional honour my riding-whip fell somewhat heavily upon the delinquent. It should have fallen upon Serafino if upon any one, who doubtless was aware of the little transaction, but a future opportunity presented itself to punish the portly Serafino, not however with a whip, but with a wooden chair ; of that incident by and by.

More recent visitors since 1868, and those who go now in flocks to Assisi, will find it difficult to realise how few people from foreign lands entered through the gates of the city of St. Francis in the year of which I write. That charming French author, Paul Sabatier, had not written his world-famed life of the saint, nor had Jörgensen supplemented it with another aspect of the character and traditions of the Franciscan movement. Indeed, save in Italian circles, and then only among the widely-read, the leading facts alone of the saint's life were available through current literature. The several outlines of his life were recorded by references to him in books upon Art, such as Lord Lindsay's *Sketches of Christian Art* : and Mrs. Jameson's admirable books introduced his career to the English student, but as far as I know no important life of St. Francis had appeared in English in 1868. The *Fioretti* had certainly not been translated, nor had the *Mirror of Perfection*, so admirably given in English by Sebastian Evans, seen the light. Mr. Ruskin had not

been in Assisi, in fact no one of note had been there to study either the life of the saint or the art to which his life had given birth. Cristofani, the historian of Assisi, had written his history of Assisi, and it had just been published in 1868, for I read it then, but I am not aware that this admirable book has been translated into English.

Neither the artistic world nor intelligent people in general were much interested in primitive Italian Art in any of its forms, architecture, sculpture, or painting, and the subject of art-craftsmanship had received no votaries. The taste for Art in England had been mainly set for a hundred years by Reynolds' *Discourses*, Fuseli's *Lectures*, and Lessing's *Laokoön*. It is true that Ruskin had published his little book upon Giotto in Padua, and a charming work it is, and it is true also that Ruskin and Sir Charles Eastlake, towards the early middle part of the nineteenth century, laboured diligently to form a taste for primitive art by bringing the primitive painters of Italy into notice in England; hence in cultivated circles their works became objects of study and delight. But they were in no sense the fashion. In 1868 they were only discussed in very select circles. Eastlake, and Burton afterwards, both of them highly cultivated artists as well as admirable scholars, and by far the most learned as well as tactful directors our National Gallery has yet been fortunate enough to possess, added priceless pictures to the national collection.

Nevertheless, Assisi, the throne as well as the cradle of primitive Italian art, was little known even by name, and the arts which adorn it, and the influences which created them, had been seen and felt by comparatively few even of the educated class. People went to Perugia, but the majority passed by Assisi, or, at the most, only remained there for a day. It is not remarkable, therefore, that in my three months' sojourn

there, as far as I know, only two Englishmen arrived in Assisi, my friend William Davies and the well-known designer John Clayton. With both of these interesting men pleasant and instructive days were spent in the upper and lower Church of St. Francis. One day I was told that a very distinguished Abbé had arrived, and had asked permission to come to our sitting-room. Presently the Abbé Liszt walked in. I had known him in Rome during two winters, where he was a great favourite in society, a splendid specimen of a man, and a pianist the like of whose playing I do not expect to hear again. The Abbé had done me a great kindness in Rome. He had heard from mutual friends that I was recovering from a severe illness in the spring of 1867, and that I was a prisoner in my little rooms in 123 Via Felice, the same rooms occupied by Leighton when he painted his great "Procession in honour of Cimabue." To console my solitary hours I had hired a piano whereon to engage myself with Bach and Beethoven. Liszt knew my passion for music, and one afternoon, while I was trying to overcome some of the difficulties presented to an amateur by the passionate music of Schumann, I paused a moment from the muddle I was making, and, hearing a slight sound, I looked round, and there stood the great pianist in the doorway. The kind Liszt had come to play to me. Indeed I felt ashamed that so great an artist should have heard, for even a single instant, my tinkling efforts, and my feeble attempts to convey to myself the deep feeling, and to overcome the technical complexity, of Schumann's "Novelletten." But he was generous and not censorious; great men are wont to be so, for they know the difficulties they have encountered in order to convey as well as create emotion. Little men are critical, the great are appreciative. He said in French, "Shall I show you how to play Schumann?" There

and then sitting down, he brought out of my little piano sounds which only he could have created out of a very ordinary instrument. Presently, I think, he forgot the inferiority of the instrument, forgot me and himself too, and played on and on without saying a word for more than a hour, and left me very happy. Perhaps this was one of the most complete musical treats of my life; it came so unexpectedly, the kindness was so spontaneous and entirely unasked-for. I do not believe Liszt ever played better in his life. The kind thought had inspired him. On the occasion of his visit to me in Assisi he said, "Have you a piano?" "Alas, no," was my answer. "If you had," said the great master, "I would have played to you again." It was but a flying visit to Assisi, Liszt leaving for Rome upon the same afternoon. Lovers of music are aware of Liszt's generous attitude towards Wagner when an unrecognized artist, and of the greatness of his disposition, which favoured the advance of his art before any personal considerations.

Liszt was a great man, greater than his music, and his generous nature was reflected in every note, cadenza, and chord of his playing. The episode I have related is eminently characteristic of the great artist and the kind man.

About the same time another foreign visitor appeared, much to my surprise and pleasure. Early one morning Serafino came to my bedroom to tell me that late on the previous night a dark Roman had arrived, and had asked for me; he had given no name. Serafino indicated the chamber in which he slept. As noiselessly as possible I turned the handle of the door and peeped in, for my curiosity was mixed with a pleasant anticipation. From between the sheets there appeared an entirely unmistakable nose, which could belong only to one man, Giovanni Costa, the exiled patriot. Costa had come from Florence to pay us a little visit. We had

not met since before the Mentana failure. Two delightful days we spent together, either wandering among the olive groves or drinking in the beauties of Cimabue, Giotto, Giunta da Pisa, Taddeo Gaddi, Simone Memmi, Pietro Cavallini, and other incomparable masters of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Never was there a more illuminating companion than "Nino," as his intimate friends always called him. Art was a religion to him. Stern and critical he was when he believed that Art was being sold for a mess of pottage. Superficial attainments, shirking of difficulties, sham cleverness, and acrobatic tricks in painting, were anathema. Costa saw nature like a Greek, big, strong, and severe. He saw first the large forces which go to the making of a picture, the bones of nature, the inclusive masses, in unbroken lines, and within these, not outside them, he felt the details, but always as subservient items to an all-embracing scheme, which, if not noble in the initiative, must fail to produce a great emotion. He would take my palette, and, with determined uncompromising vigour knock out of my studies what he used to call "*impertinenze!*" Nothing irritated him more than to see an even finish; by that I mean a finish which was not of relative value to its object. "You must unfinish often to finish" was a favourite dictum of his, and yet no artist I have ever known put more labour and patiently wrought details into his work, never small in style, never conceived or executed for effect, but just there to help to tell the whole truth. If detail did not help to tell the big story which line and mass of colour and light suggested, it had to go. Costa eliminated freely, but never so much as to withhold intimate and suggestive points of high finish. In studying from nature he used to tell me to sit down before a scene and paint it *au premier*, or to return and struggle over it for twenty times. The first impression is always true, and

you can leave it with its qualities and defects. But if you return to add, to paint a second time, you should make up your mind to spoil what you have done ; then you must toil on day after day, and finally, if you have been true to the first impression, it will reappear stronger through the intimate acquaintance gained by prolonged study which has enriched and not impoverished your first impression. That was Costa's advice, and sound advice it was.

After such sound lessons, which Costa gave so freely and logically, one felt a stronger man, stronger to visualize and to interpret, also more patient in the struggle for true art, and more fixed in power of will to succeed seriously. As I grow old, I see more and more the wisdom of Costa's teaching, and, I must add, the unwisdom of much that is taught in these more happy-go-lucky days of ephemeral experiments, loose design, and inefficient and, may I say, sometimes senseless technique. The old-fashioned training was severe and workmanlike,—it at least made a good craftsman, and what else can training produce ? An artist cannot be created by severe training, or by any training, but he is the better for having received it. I would back a well-trained artist of moderate talent to make a better figure in the long run than an ill-trained genius. The first may achieve a great deal ; the second will assuredly fall away when the impulse is exhausted.

It pleases me to record the great principles which not only guided Giovanni Costa, but guided all the great fore-runners. And the truth of the teaching which their work maintains has been exemplified all through the ages, and will be again, for Truth has a goodly habit of cropping up when she is least expected.

When my delightful companion left to return to his work in Florence, I had to go on alone, to search for myself, and I spent much more time in the olive gardens, upon the slopes of

the hills, in long tramps, with my paint-box as my only companion, than in the churches. I see now that nature did attract me more than Art! This was the first time I had felt free to let nature lead me, to give her a free hand with me. And it is a good thing that the opportunity of getting intimate with nature was employed in trying to do so, rather than in trying to become an antiquarian, a connoisseur, or an expert critic. In a long life I have seen many an ardent and gifted young painter ruined as an artist by antiquarian research and picture-gallery acquaintance. And it was a good thing that I was much alone, for surely it is only in solitude that nature begins to reveal herself and unfold her loveliness.

So, looking back, I feel no regret that Assisi in 1868 was not prolific of visitors, but quite the reverse. Nor was intellectual society to be found there as far as I was concerned, so there was nothing to distract, but everything combined towards concentration. The charm of the ancient town nestling in an austere, as well as exquisite landscape, grew in potency. At the same time the fascination of the country, after a while, became so irresistible that I regretted every hour not spent outside the gates. In this growing mood of enthusiasm for a free outdoor life, perhaps one's emotions became clarified, perhaps the artificial in one's nature was giving way to the natural, getting more into tune, more strung up with the kind of quiet subjection best calculated for the enjoyment of works of art which emanated from simple and direct characters created and nourished by a life far nearer the peasant's than the prince's. So one was preparing to enjoy the charms of the country, the fascination which the ancient town enforced with its extreme quiet, and the peaceful attitude of an orderly and homely people still living in a measure under the spell of the teaching of its great saint.

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Retrospective, 1868

To appreciate, hence really to enjoy, the kind of art which the thirteenth century created, a mood has to be gradually kindled—it cannot be commanded, it cannot be hurried; it must grow out of some species of harmony which the soul and mind have prepared by a peaceful adjustment and balance of many qualities and kinds of emotion in kinship with intellectual restraint.

This mood developed in an atmosphere of exactly the kind to nourish it. Two churches containing the most remarkable wall-paintings of the thirteenth century; a city in harmony with them, with itself and breathing of antiquity. A city which tradition says, and probably rightly, gave birth to the graceful poet Propertius, which we know was the mother of St. Francis and Sta. Chiara, where Benedict instituted his Order, where Bernardino da Siena lived for a time, and where he preached to an earnest and receptive congregation still spiritually exalted by the memory of Francis so recently with them in the flesh. In this mediæval town Peace seemed to reign and give her blessing to Poverty. A sense of security grew with the fact that there was not a single soldier in the place, so rare was crime, so well conducted the people, and even now in 1914 three *gens d'armes* are sufficient military protection for the whole commune of Assisi. An hour after Ave Maria every gate of the city leading into the country was closed for the night; no one could leave or enter the city after that hour but by permission of the *Sindaco*. By 10 P.M. the streets were as silent as a tomb, no brawls occurred to waken the sleeper, who, refreshed by tranquil sleep, was alert at dawn, ready to face the world and labour with renewed energy. At the conclusion of two months' stay Assisi seemed to have grown into me—it had certainly taken deep hold of my affections, and it still holds a place in my heart quite unique and undisturbed by much travel in Europe and the near East.

Assisi

It cannot raise a feeling of surprise that I chose Assisi to be the birthplace of my first child, the first, and I believe the last, English child to be born within its walls, and within a stone's throw of the house of Sta. Chiara's parents, from whence she fled to be received into the Order of St. Francis in the little church of Portiuncula,[1] and within four minutes' walk of the house of Pietro di Bernardone and Madonna Pica his wife, father and mother of Francesco.

Anent Pica there is a pretty legend of the fifteenth century. It tells how, when Madonna Pica's hour for delivery arrived, a pilgrim knocked at the door, and, when it was opened, he said that the child could not be born till the mother had left her luxurious bedroom and taken her place in an adjacent stable and reposed upon straw in one of the stalls. This being done, the child immediately appeared. The stable was afterwards converted into a chapel. Over the door of it is the following inscription :—

> Hoc oratorium fuit bovis et asini stabulum
> In quo natus est Franciscus mundi speculum.

True or not, this legend is in harmony with Franciscan faith and poetical fancy.

Within a stone's throw also of the Leone d' Oro is the ancient Church of Santa Maria del Vescovado, in which Francis was received by Bishop Guido II., a still older church than the Cathedral of San Rufino designed by John of Gubbio. So unique an event as the birth of an English child in such an historically sanctified environment, an environment embracing the birthplace of the most potent religious order the Christian world has seen, is sufficient excuse for telling of it here as a matter of history as well as a romantic episode. In the early morning of August 6,

[1] "Portziuncula" is the proper Italian spelling, but "Portiuncula" is accepted.

1868, I was informed that before many hours a child was to be expected. Then arose a grave difficulty. There was no telegraphic communication between Assisi and Rome, the nearest telegraphic station being at Foligno, some thirteen miles away. Il Gobbo was saddled swiftly, and ere many minutes the nag at a hand-gallop was taking me to Foligno, whence a telegram was sent to a wise woman in Rome, urging her to answer and come at once. Such despatches took time to arrive and time to depart in those early days of scientific facilities in a country young to such things; it is not surprising that six hours went by ere I received a response. Somehow no fear or nervous suggestions crossed my mind for an instant; I felt there was a power of love guarding the destiny of mother and child; both, it seemed to me, were under the protection of Francis and Chiara. To pass the time of waiting I played dominoes and bowls with merry companions. Il Gobbo had partaken of oats and hay in plenty, and sped along the homeward way more quickly than he came. It was a hot, still evening. Ave Maria had just chimed when I entered the eastern gate of the city, where a large crowd of townspeople was collected. Quietly and with dignity a man came forward and said to me, "È nato uno figlio a lei." Then there arose a gentle murmur of congratulation from the crowd, and my horse was led as in a kind of triumph through the street, past the house of Sta. Chiara, past the ancient Church of Santa Maria, to the Golden Lion. All had gone well, a priest had been sent for, and our child was baptized into the Roman Church under the name of Francis. It is impossible to describe the enthusiasm with which every man and woman in the little city greeted the new Francis, and their joy that I, a Protestant and no Christian, but, as I was afterwards informed, a worshipper of an eagle, had named my child after their beloved saint. So sympathetic was

the Bishop of Assisi, whose palace is close at hand, that he silenced the bells of Santa Maria at my request lest their sound should disturb the sleep of mother and child. From one direction quiet was assured, from another it was not; the occasion gave rise to festivity. The Leone d' Oro was a centre where Serafino and his friends neglected no opportunity of enjoying good red wine upon festivals, when red Chianti flowed round and down. The company fell to singing improvized words and music, if so it could be called, after the fashion of country *stornelli.* As the wine went round the singing gained in strength, and dreadful the noise became. However honoured I ought to have felt, I am afraid I lost my temper. In fact I entered the room when the conviviality was at its height, and taking up a wooden chair I whirled it about with such fury that the company, Serafino included, made prompt exit into the street. It was a drastic measure and succeeded; there was no more noise, and, much to the credit of Serafino and his friends, they took the furious attack in good part, indeed with respect, for I heard one say to another, "Veda come ama il suo Francesco, il Signorino." Their good-humour put me in the wrong, and I apologized.

Who can wonder at an affection growing for such impetuous, spontaneous, as well as kindly and generous folk? It was my wish that little Francis should be rebaptized from water in the font in San Rufino, St. Francis' font, but the Bishop very kindly though firmly said, "If you were a Catholic, Yes; as you are a Protestant, No," and so ended the little Franciscan episode.

Before I close this opening chapter, which is, I know, rather egoistic, I would like to consider how far the primitive Art in Assisi arrested me, and how little or how much I was at that period able to understand its quiet fervour, or to enter into the mysteries of its significance, restraint, and the inward spirit sometimes so quaintly

interpreted. Looking back, I think I see now that I was *not* prepared to receive it in full, only to understand it partially. I enjoyed it, but did not inherit and possess all there was to be received. The experiences which life presents and the inevitable discipline which they exercise and command, the sorrows gone through and mastered which no one can avoid, the disappointments which no one can evade, unquestionably do prepare the mind to receive spontaneous and child-like art for which inexperience is not prepared. In Rome, Raphael and Michelangelo, the Greek vases, and the Etruscan remains of painting, had completely absorbed me, and everything in Rome which was related to pre-Christian periods held a charm over me. I was a Pagan, and am one still with additions. I found Paganism in Raphael and in Michelangelo. I found in their art a scientific spirit which attracted me, a gigantic conquest over the matter of art through which they commanded and directed their ideal. Their art satisfied my youthful inquisitiveness; it spoke to my emotion and my reason, mostly to my reason; it possessed me with great ambition; it urged me to follow in their footsteps; it impelled me to study the grammar of my art, to master the science of anatomy, to know the figure *ad unguem*. And I do not think, on re-reading my mind, such as it was, that I cared nearly so much then for what great artists said as for how they said it. Imitation of nature did not attract me. I wondered at the illusory power of the art of Fortuny; it made me inquisitive; it puzzled me but did not move me one bit. Academic perfection of style was too constantly uppermost in the value I set upon ancient art, and above all choice selection and style appealed to me primarily.

As early as 1860 and 1861 I was in Italy, and it is true that I studied the work of Giotto in the Arena Chapel at Padua, and that I drew from his beautiful works there and elsewhere. But

in looking through my drawings and sketches made in the summer visits to Italy of 1860 and 1861, although they represent a wide area of study, it appears that of all the masters Tintoretto appealed most to me, and this appeal was made to me directly and not through books, for I had never read a word about Tintoretto before going to Venice. Mr. Ruskin had not written a line about Tintoretto then. Tintoretto was far from being a well-known master ; his reputation stood a long way behind that of Titian and Paolo Veronese. Even Leighton in 1862 scolded me for my admiration of him. I held my peace and admired him still. After studying the Scuola di San Rocco and the many specimens of work of Tintoretto, the Michelangelo of Venice, in churches there, I confess to have found the work of Giotto in the Arena Chapel beautiful, but temperate perhaps towards coldness, and it was not until years after, and in response to repeated study, that the inwardness of Giotto's work began to appeal strongly to me in any measure of finality, and I began to see his strength was in restraint, his vigour the reflex of truth. In all probability my taste in art was too eclectic. I had seen too much for so young a man. My mind had been fed by a great variety of styles, and yet it did maintain a preference that I see quite clearly now, and that preference was for dramatic design, for intense fervour, for learned expression, for pronounced individuality of approach, perhaps also for masterly but not facile technique.

I think the evidence of struggle fascinated me. I say this because even the work of one of the great mannerists, Giulio Romano, unquestionably a painter of high genius, overwhelmed me by the vitality, energy, and often great beauty of design in his now widely criticized work in the Palazzo del Te at Mantua.

Perhaps by the year 1868 I had seen too much, and had fed too much upon the masterful attitude of the later painters of the

Renaissance, which accounts for a certain critical attitude and coldness of approach, which no doubt tended to hinder enthusiasm and render my understanding of primitive art something in the nature of artificial culture. I drew much in the lower church, which appealed to me differently from and, in a sense, more than, the upper, and yet I am quite sure that at the back of my senses I did miss the perfection of form, the variety of design, and perhaps the greater, higher, technical achievements in which the art of Michelangelo, Raphael, and Tintoretto excelled.

I think I determined to like the primitives. I think I viewed their art as associated with the romantic life of St. Francis and with the stirring story of the thirteenth century, when faith was so close to superstition, so close to paganism, a time when every happening was associated with a divine intervention or under immediately divine influence, when men's minds seem to have been fed by the imagination more than by reason, believing they walked with God in a personal sense, and in a sense as real to them as it had been thousands of years before to the primitive Hebrew race.

A new story to a young and impulsive aptitude is of almost overwhelming importance — it forces itself; it will be listened to; it may drive out all power of analysis; it dominates; it may even intercept the action of reason. The *Fioretti* of St. Francis was a new story to me then. Everything in his birthplace reminded me of him. Indeed, how can that be wondered at? Francis is the central figure of that little city which has changed so little since his day. So I think it was Francis more than Cimabue and Giotto that captivated me. No place in Europe can claim to possess a greater number of absolutely reliable sites of great events than Assisi. Francis' life from his birth to his death is told from his birth-house to his deathplace,

the little Place of Portiuncula. One might venture to say that the pavements of the town remain as they were laid 700 years ago. Undoubtedly true is this of some, and even where changes have been wrought, and where the town has grown (and it has grown but little), they have not been so numerous or drastic as to obscure the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century buildings, which dominate still.

The spirit of the Middle Ages has not evaporated under change in a little city which to-day seems to provide an aroma of old-fashioned immobility unrivalled, perhaps unapproached, by any other in Italy. Hence the curious attraction of Assisi. Alas, in 1868 the two great churches were little cared for; indeed, the upper had been seriously neglected. Its roof let in water, which bathed the walls, and separated the thin *intonaco* from the bricks which had received the pigments of Giunta da Pisa, Cimabue, and Giotto. The *intonaco* had become separated from the porous bricks; it had either fallen away, or become dissolved into powder by the disintegration of its component parts, lime and sand. So deserted had the church become that mass was never said there, and parts of it were in the condition of a lumber room. The magnificent array of stalls once there, even the altar itself, had been removed and consigned to a corner in the monastery. Happily, later on, the Italian Government, in the person of the Minister of Fine Arts, restored the stalls to their place, and what remained of the altar was replaced and admirably restored by local workmen. I was in Assisi in 1894 when these repairs and readjustments were going on, and with pleasure I can testify to the care the master-mason and his workmen employed upon what was an intricate and very difficult matter of preservation as well as restoration. An Italian "Artist"—for all members of crafts or trades in Italy are "Artists" when they choose

—can be a first-rate craftsman, none better. He has all the old traditions of his craft at his finger-ends, whatever the craft may be. As a mason he understands how to adjust the power of his lime, so that it will hold but not crack, knows how to cut without breaking them the various stones which the neighbourhood provides, according to their hard or soft natures, and all the working and traditions of tarsia work are familiar. When he chooses to do so, the Italian craftsman can put as much zeal and patience into his labours as ever he did in older and simpler days. He is still an artist craftsman when called upon to be so.

There was some outcry and some apprehension expressed when the idea of restoring the frescoes of Giotto and Cimabue was first published. Very rightly the lovers of thirteenth-century art feared lest the restorer's hand might injure the old work. The fear was unfounded, as the result has been satisfactory. There has been no injury done to the old work. What remained of it and that which had parted from the wall partially, and there was a very great deal, has been permanently secured, and if the roof is kept in good order, and free from holes into which wet can penetrate, and the walls thus remain dry, the works of the three great masters, Giunta da Pisa, Cimabue, and Giotto, will withstand the inroads of natural decay for centuries to come. Unfortunately, to my thinking, some of the frescoes in the lower church have been over-cleaned. This has been done recently. Consequently, where that has been the case, the frescoes appear out of tone with those in their vicinity which have remained untouched ; and I very much hope the cleaning process will not go on.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the lower church was barbarously treated ; that is unquestionable. There are some terrible frescoes here and there of the sham-classic order, and still

worse Baroque taste, then madly pursuing its way all over Italy, is to be seen haunting the beauty of thirteenth-century work. Altars of vile taste were erected at the expense of destruction of primitive work. The Palladian and Baroque Philistines had no respect for the really classical work of their predecessors, which they regarded as barbarian, whereas now the more enlightened (I hope we may remain so) regard Palladian and Baroque work with the reverse of admiration, save for the dexterity and arithmetical calculations which are involved in its vagaries and senseless artificialities. We respect the ability of the artists after the chaste period of the Renaissance, but can we love their work? I think not. There is nothing to love in it. It is unrestrained yet calculating, monotonous and mannered when it is not brutal or cold, and impudent in contradiction of every well-defined and noble tradition.

The artists of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had their way for a time in Assisi. They destroyed a great deal of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century work to make room for their modern rubbish. Happily in many examples, in their hurry to advertise the new style, they only cased an old building in the new manner, and sometimes they placed a hideous altar in front of some exquisite fresco without entirely destroying it. Instances have occurred when the removal of some unworthy erection against the wall has revealed delightful work by Giotto and his followers; especially is that the case in the Church of Santa Chiara, which in 1868 was full of barbaric *Art Nouveau* of the sixteenth century. And, indeed, the messengers of the sham classic did play havoc with San Rufino with a vengeance. The west front remains to testify to the nobility of this Romanesque building. The interior testifies to the vulgarity of the taste of Galeasso Alessi, who in the later years of the sixteenth

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century modernized it in accordance with the vulgar fashion of the time. Nevertheless, I do not believe that the skeleton of that building has been destroyed, but that it was just cased mostly with hard stucco. I dare not say that I advocate the removal of the disfiguring sham architecture, but I would like to see it done, for it is mighty ugly architecture which is concealing a fine work of art. It is true that the effect of colour made by the crude tints and much gold in the decoration under certain conditions of light and shade is rather splendid and very tempting to the modern painter ; indeed I promised myself to make a record of it under the golden light of late afternoon. The effect of the rather barbarous decoration in San Rufino reminds one of Spanish churches, where sometimes tawdry realities reveal a rather splendid harmony out of discords at a time of day when a small quantity of direct light is admitted. Strong contrast of light and dark, out of which brilliant details gleam and glitter with uncertainty as to their meaning or design, covers up a multitude of the designer's sins.

But after all this is only a painter's view of picturesque effect, which has nothing to do with architectural proprieties, truthful construction and judiciously applied ornament.

There is one church in Assisi which years ago filled me with delight, and it still does so—San Pietro. It is little visited, was never finished, and is untouched by sham-classic adventurers. San Pietro stands upon the flank of a grass-grown piazza just inside the first gate on the right-hand side of the road which leads to Assisi from Santa Maria degli Angeli. The west front is eleventh century. Obviously the church is unfinished. It has been stated that St. Francis made efforts to restore it. The dome has been left of rough brick inside, constructed, as I believe, to receive mosaic. The style of the architecture is curiously Saracenic. The arches are stilted and pointed after the Saracenic fashion.

The nave is lower than the east end, which is raised in its whole length about one foot. San Pietro is not a basilica ! I have been unable to find out what tradition says as to its authorship. The west front is evidently of an earlier date than the rest of the building. Strongly reminding one of an Arab fourteenth-century mosque in Cairo, it suggests the possibility that the builder might have been an Oriental settled in Assisi, or possibly a crusader, anyway an Eastern traveller who revived in Assisi his Eastern reminiscences. But this is only conjecture. The elegant stone canopies erected against the north and south walls would seem to contradict my suggestion, for they are quite Italian in style ; still it is possible that they were added later, for they do not appear to be part of the original structure. The cemetery adjoining San Pietro is romantic and strange. The view from it of the tower of the church is extremely striking. Here again one is reminded of Eastern design.

All these things much interested me. But perhaps more than any buildings in the city, and more than the art in them, more than the associations they recall, or perhaps it would be true to say in a different degree, the country outside the walls fascinated me. In 1868, as in my last year's visit to Assisi (1913), not a day passed but on horseback, in a little carriage, or on foot, I wandered hither and thither upon the bleak slopes of Monte Subasio, down or along the deep gorge behind the castle of Barba Rossa, known now as La Rocca, or up the winding little paths (and there are many of them) leading up to the Carcere, or descending among the olive groves to San Damiano, or meandering without intention, and in a kind of half-dream taking things in without an effort, in a sense of pure enjoyment without let or hindrance, indeed, often pocketing my sketch-book that I might the more readily forget my business, and become

saturated with the beauty of nature ; roaming in and out of the cropped fields, among the ripening maize, the sinuous vines, or watching the peasants ploughing ; and often in their times of rest sitting with them to hear their tales ; thus I lived in a dream of bucolic life as perfect as Virgil and Horace enjoyed in their farms within sight of Rome. There are times and seasons when inactivity produces the best harvest. In this restless twentieth century, so far, there is a lack of cogitation, because the modern restless pursuer of change and variety of sensations does not seem to realize the value of inactivity. We are learning to pursue while we are actively producing and bringing to fruition, but during that process we are engrossed with technical difficulties which manifest themselves with conscious prominence, thus dividing our attention between motive and the statement of it. When we are in the act of production we are learning, but only concerning what is immediately under the hand. But when we are ruminating, mentally meandering, by a cessation of active vitality we absorb with greater freedom and generosity than when we are producing. By long experience I know, in my old age, how impressions live on silently which have been received in moments when the hand has been idle and the higher senses only have been insensibly active, and command fulfilment : and that demand for fulfilment may come at an unexpected moment, and perhaps years after an impression has been received. Impressions which have been sifted by time ; as seed they have germinated in the mind and appear afterwards as a flower, perhaps when the time of sowing has been quite forgotten. It may be dangerous, in a way, to inculcate the heresy of physical inactivity in the young, but even for those who are in the very swirl of life, in the swift stream of endeavour, who are, as it were, at school learning how to present or represent

(I do not care which of these words I use !), there is a time for ruminating and automatically meandering, lest activity may induce mannerism, and facility may become empty of spontaneous and deeply-rooted sensation, the child of quiet instinctive emotion. I think that the peace of Assisi in those early days taught me to permit the mind to wait upon impressions, and to receive them without immediately spending them—to wait upon them, to wait until accidents had vanished from the vision, and the memory retained only such essentials as observation had established, and the mind had laid hold of and afterwards sifted, and had put in the relative order of their value. But such an acute and delicate power of receptivity as I seek to convey comes rarely, indeed one may say scarcely ever, in the whirl and bustle of a great town where existence bristles with artificiality of enterprise, of unaccountable, even unrecognized, and unrelated distractions.

So when I have gone back so many times to the little city of the soul, to the palace of distinguished poverty, year by year, as soon as the empty caverns of the mind made by the hurry of life in London and of other great artificial places were refilled, I found that the renewal of quiescent meandering restored the imagination. The early bloom had not left the flower sown in peace; things which delighted me long ago delighted me again ; the new impressions were the children of the old ones, and continuity grew. Hence youth was revived, a new peace appeared, and the growth of reason had rendered emotional impressions more reliable and constant, truer and more permanently effective. Before I conclude this chapter I may say that what I have written has been prompted by a desire to account for the motives which urged me to go back and back to Assisi, and though I have ventured to introduce personal events, the narrative would have been defective without them, and I leave, with

IN THE FASTNESS OF UMBRIA

(*By permission of Sir Charles Walston*)

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regret, some delightful memories of my young manhood, but with gratitude that three months' sojourn during an impressionable period of life were enjoyed, and I believe profitably, in the little city of St. Francis.

> Here was the world's broad highway made narrow,
> Here the way broader for the chosen people ;
> Here grew the Rule ; here Poverty, our Lady,
> Smiting down pride, called back the Cross among us.[1]

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[1] *The Mirror of Perfection*, translated by Sebastian Evans.

With Mr. Gladstone it was my privilege to stay at Monte Cassino in 1866. He was the guest of the Archbishop of Monte Cassino, and Padre Tosti, the learned and charming *abate*.

As may be expected, Monte Cassino was more like a palace than a religious house. Its vast extent and sumptuous church proclaimed great wealth, while the library gave evidence of traditional and deep learning. Times and seasons were kept, but asceticism was evident more in principle than in action. An intellectual atmosphere predominated over an ascetic. The huge library, containing priceless books, was the main centre of interest, and more directly and permanently so than the ornate church, richly covered with rare marbles in the style of Jesuit taste, never restrained, and sometimes exuberant to the verge of vulgarity. It was just after the visit to which I can only allude that Mr. Gladstone made his famous speech in Florence upon the preservation or reservation of the chief Benedictine houses from the wholesale emancipation then going on, a speech which directly influenced the Italian Government to permit Monte Cassino to continue as a seat of learning and centre of humanist education.

I must not forget Monte Oliveto Maggiore, another great Benedictine monastery founded in the fourteenth century by the Viennese noble Giovanni Tolomei. Under the auspices of a succession of Abbots a whole territory has been reclaimed from waste lands (as the Italians call them, "Terra ingrata"), indeed almost desert, by the energy and labour of the fathers and lay brothers. Alas, the library, which was second in distinction to that of Monte Cassino, has been completely dispersed; practically no books of value remain to tell the tale of its extensive possessions. But the noble rooms which contained them are there to testify to the value set upon their contents, to the care and high rare taste with which the Benedictine scholars enshrined priceless editions

and MSS. dating from the earliest period of culture in Italy. In the cloisters Luca Signorelli, and Bazzi, called Sodoma, executed some of their celebrated works in illustration of the events of the life of St. Benedict. Bazzi is seen at his best here ; Signorelli is more amply represented in Orvieto.

Situated in undulating country, fertilized wherever possible and highly cultivated, where the cypress and the oak grow in processions over tracks of rocky or generous soil, stands the huge pile of buildings. Monte Cassino has been the haven to which many cultivated Englishmen have turned for rest, inspiration, and the deepest enjoyment of nature's ever-varying scenes and moods. I was enticed there partly by the reputation for courtesy and charm of the Abate de Negri, who was a living type of a cultured Benedictine of the fifteenth century. An elegant scholar, his humorous verses in Latin and Italian touched first pathos then humour : and mixed together with a fantasy quite his own, his verses, satirical and humorous rather in the manner of Swift, charmed many a modern humanist. I shall never forget a fortnight spent alone with the Abate, who, from respect for my wish for solitude during the daytime, except at meals and at the end of a day's work, left me to wander and study at my will. But when the hour of rest and refreshment came in due course, his ready wit, his learning, his perfectly spontaneous joviality, caused the walls to echo with our laughter and merry jokes. And the wine ! Well, I dare do no more than remember it ; and many a good cigar we smoked ! So respected and loved was this perfect type of an Italian priest of letters that his English friends subscribed towards the erection of a monument to him when the great inevitable called him away a few years after my pleasant visit to Monte Oliveto Maggiore. It now came to my turn, and for the first time, to pass a month in the Santuario delle

Carceri sopra Assisi. I had been there before the time I now mention upon two occasions, in 1869 and 1883, but only as a tourist, that is to say, for a visit of a day each time. The place so attracted me that I determined, upon the first opportunity which might present itself, to throw myself into the Franciscan life for a brief period, that I should, *in propria persona*, experience some of its exceptional distinction and spell by living as the brothers lived, without appealing to tinned and other unwholesome foods too often provided by inn-keepers. I felt it was not necessary for me to ask permission to make my stay there, because I had formed an acquaintance with the Padre Superiore upon previous occasions, one of which I became aware afterwards had cemented our friendship. Concerning that I will tell presently.

My experience of travel has been various, and there is scarce a means of locomotion that it has not been my pleasure or pain to adopt; the camel in Egypt; the little rough horse or mule, sure-footed it is true, but tiresome to ride, in the mountains of the Morea and the fortresses of the Abruzzi and Sabine Hills. An ox-cart has sometimes served me as a bed in the fair summer nights in Tuscany, and very comfortable one may be, lying on clean straw, with one's knapsack as a pillow. In this way of travel one becomes intimate with peasants and persons of every degree; one is sure of seeing the dawn and sunrise; one is at liberty to walk or ride, to keep awake or to sleep at nights. The movement is slow, and the music of the ill-greased wheels is by no means unpleasant. But next to the use of one's own legs for passing from place to place, I prefer the service of the ass as a burden-bearer. That strange and clever beast is much maligned, I think because he invariably demonstrates an extreme dislike to work save upon his own

conditions, which are, to go slowly, to rob the roadside of every piece of sweet grass or thistle, for which he is ever on the look-out, and without giving himself away, occasionally to roll over when flies annoy him, to bray loudly whenever he passes a friend; and if he dislikes a rider who may have offended his pride or vanity, upon the first occasion of the presentation of a wall convenient for taking his revenge, he will ruthlessly grind his enemy's leg against it and force immediate descent from his back; when that has been effected and the object of his dislike has been evicted, having satisfied his revenge, he will permit a remount, and things may go better. I prefer to walk in front of an ass rather than to go behind him. I like to pay a boy to use a stick, and to see that the ingenious quadruped does not upset my little luggage or roll with it in the mud or stones, perhaps down a hill. One need never be dull in company with an ass. Brother Ass is an estimable quadruped, full of humour, and in reality a much more discreet person than the horse, for he is consistently determined to work as little as possible, to exert his great strength at a minimum, and he never by any chance objects to standing quite still, varying the position of his ears as his sagacious mind suggests fresh mischief. He will patiently wait while an artist makes a drawing, even from his back.

The ass is the antithesis of a motor car, which is restless, unresponsive, noisy, and tiresome. The advantage of a motor car is to proceed as quickly as possible from place to place unregardful of beauty and interest, leaving thick selfishly-roused tracts of dust behind. When the motor stands still, he presents a ridiculous object of cumbrous ineptitude; when he is going full speed he is the symbol of everything in modern times which is most antagonistic to harmony. The enemy of silence and introspection, he is the apotheosis of noise, of despatch, of disintegration; his bray

MONASTERY OF THE CARCERI, ASSISI

(*By permission of the late Rt. Hon. Lord Justice Kennedy*)

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is more discordant and far more frequent than that of an ass. The motor car is a kind of machine-made animal, with all the animal vices and not one of its attractions.

Some of the most delectable places in Italy are found where there are no ways of admission save by bridle-roads, or sheep-walks of great antiquity, happily impossible for motor cars or even for carriages; they can be reached on a mule or ass's back, or better still on foot. Though the Santuario of the Carceri is only three English miles from Assisi, it is reached by a very rough, and in one place a very steep road, in many places unfit for carts or carriages, so the tourist motor-horn is never heard there, nor does the inefficient semi-conscious tourist present his goggled countenance and fitful activity in that peaceful and sacred place.

The Carceri were originally composed of a few natural caves. Originally, and in the earliest period of the Franciscan movement, there was no building there, not even a hut. The other *luogo* or place in the plain, Portiuncula, was a collection of huts surrounded by a hedge, having in the centre a dilapidated chapel of a much earlier time than Francis', supposed to have been built by pilgrims on their return from the Holy Land in the fifth century. The Carceri, or "In Carcere," the truer term for this retreat, had been a favourite resort for hermits for centuries before St. Francis. It was a hermitage, *feremo*, crematorium, or a burying-place for all worldly desires, it was also a retreat or *retiro* where in those early days men so disposed could retire from strife and enjoy the fruits of meditation and solitude. To this retreat or prison Francis went often, passing his time in prayer and meditation, and in his early days alone. By degrees scattered buildings grew up, probably over sheds and among the higher levels of caves. The cave which tradition tells us was inhabited by

St. Francis was built round and incorporated in the building early in the history of the Franciscan movement, but after the death of the saint. Finally falling into disrepair, the monastic building was restored by San Bernardino da Siena, the celebrated preacher as well as consistent follower of the Rule. Since his time it has received few additions; it may be safe to say that as it now stands it is very much as San Bernardino left it, about 1438, when he was made Vicar-General of the Order. Local tradition affirms that St. Benedict, born at Nursia in Umbria, lived for a period in one of the many caves in Carceri formed in the rocky gorge which carried the water of the melting snow and rain from the arid height of Mount Subasio. And though history does not verify this local tradition, it is not unlikely to be a true one, because not more than two miles onward towards Spello, a little higher up on the mountain than the Carceri, there is a very ancient little church in the grounds of a *mercante di campagna*, clearly of the time of St. Benedict, and part of its construction belongs to pagan times. The site as a place of worship has been occupied for at least 2000 years. If the tradition be a true one, St. Benedict's sojourn in the neighbourhood must have taken place before he went to Subiaco and there formed his Order. St. Francis visited the *sacro speco* at Subiaco, and there are the remains of a contemporary portrait of him. The remains of the original are not considerable, the painting having been much restored, but there is enough to suggest the idea that it may be a contemporary portrait and not an invented type by a primitive artist.

The position of the Carceri can be distinguished among forest trees either from the road to Spello or still better from the railway line. The building can be made out, but with difficulty, from either place. The site is prominent, because upon either side of the gorge a considerable forest of ilex and

oaks has grown up, and this provides the otherwise bare slope of the mountain with an unmistakable dark patch of green that is easily distinguishable from the brown turf which covers the greater part of the mountain facing south.

To the Carceri I started to go at the dawn of an August morning in 1904 for my third visit. Determining to stay there for three weeks or a month, I had to provide myself with plenty of painting materials and a change of raiment. Too heavy to carry, my luggage was strapped firmly, as I thought, upon the back of a stalwart ass, to be driven by a little boy who afterwards became my postman. Leaving Hotel Subasio, we made our way past San Rufino, and out of the city by a breach in the ancient walls, and slowly we trudged up the hill, the road flanked by olive groves, oaks, poplars, cypress, vines, and a kind of elm more graceful than the English tree of the same species, and past little farms where work had been going on for hours. The sun had only just risen above the mountain. Oxen were ploughing along the wayside, for in August the corn has long been cut, and new furrows are ploughed to receive fresh seed. One passed several little shrines by the roadside, each being invariably decorated with flowers or herbs which had once been fresh, side by side with fresh offerings of flowers made but a few moments ago. In St. Francis' days there was no road, as we understand roads, from Assisi to the Carceri. The slopes of the mountain were thick in forest trees, of which those I have just mentioned may be descendants. St. Francis made his way up to his retreat in the mountain from the Portiuncula, or the "little portion," which was a kind of settlement in a dense forest then covering much of the plain immediately under Assisi and where the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli now stands. He had to make his way through the forest, and among a few little farms on the lower slopes of Subasio, then he

would find himself again in another forest, and so he went by narrow sheep- or goat-walks finally to reach his place of retreat, which was a wilderness in those far-off times, and by no means easy to reach. No human sounds could reach him there, no voices, save of birds, came thither. Now, St. Francis walking from Portiuncula to the Carceri would pass San Damiano, where he might pause to see his companion, Sta. Chiara, and her nuns. I have walked by bye-paths from San Damiano to the Carceri many a time, and quite possibly have thus trodden in the long-concealed footsteps of Francis and his companions. But the road I took upon the occasion of which I write is the one now used as the straight and steep way from Assisi to the Santuario, no doubt an old road, but accommodated now to more modern needs. I, my driver-boy, and the hitherto quiescent ass got along quite well and without accident until we were reaching the part of the road which is barren and rocky. Upon one side of it there is a sudden drop, where, unfortunately, the ass set to work to kick. Nothing would stop him from his acrobatic feats till he had completely disengaged himself from all my luggage. Having done so, he gave one last kick, set back his ears, and without more ado turned round and trotted gaily back to Assisi, leaving us to collect and carry the scattered furniture for my travels. Fortunately nothing was broken, nor did I feel at all resentful against Brother Ass, who was only acting according to his nature. Avoiding any further labour in his most natural and characteristic fashion, he freed himself and enjoyed the mischief. Bit by bit the scattered fragments were brought together, and they proved to be practically intact. Presently we arrived laden with my goods at the formidable door of the monastery. It was by this time 10 o'clock. After two or three knocks, each louder than the former, a somewhat weary voice uttered "Chi è?" responded

STAIR OF ST. BENEDETTO, CARCERI

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to by the usual answer " Amici " (" Friends "), on which a bolt was slowly drawn and a big man in a blue smock opened the door. This was Giovanni the cook, who afterwards became a friend to me, and upon whom were played not a few practical jokes. Giovanni gazed somewhat doubtfully at my baggage, but permitted it to be brought into the *cortile*. I asked for the Padre Superiore, Padre Tomaso. " He is in his cell." " Can I see him ? " " I don't know ! " " Tell him that the Inglese would talk with him." " Va bene." A few moments more and I was standing within the door of the cell of Padre Tomaso. The first thing that caught my eye was a foot-bath with water and salt in it. At once I knew that my application to stay in the monastery would be granted ; the salt and water made my passport. The old man scrutinized me a while, then it was made evident that recognition had taken place. Quickly he rose, put out both hands, and greeted me fervently. Pointing to the foot-bath, he said, " I owe you, Signorino Inglese, much gratitude, for it was you that cured me of the gout. See, there is the water and the salt ; I have used both for my feet every day according to your orders, and God has blessed the cure, for now I never have bad gout ; the devil has left my feet. What can I do for you ? " " Permit me to stay in this peaceful place." " Such as we have you shall share, Signorino." Giovanni, who remained outside, was called in and told to wash out a cell overlooking the ravine and to put fresh straw into a mattress. Giovanni then conducted me up the strange stair along a passage cut out of the rock, turned the lock from a key attached to a bunch of others round his waist, and said " Ecco " with a kind of air of distinction and pride, " Ecco la sua camera." A tiny room some 9 feet by 7 it was, with a little slit of a window, having strong wooden shutters, which are needed in the exposed position of the monastery against sun, wind, and snow, where at times rain and

hail and wind, even in summer, are apt to cause serious damage to weak constructions, and maybe in five minutes may deeply flood the floor. A little table, a chair, a hand-basin, and a tiny bed made up the furniture. It seemed to me enough. The idea of a bath could not be entertained, with that luxury one had to dispense. Nothing could be more snug and appropriate. My little trunk retained my change of garments, for no chest of drawers suggested other garments than those one stands up in, and I had brought only one change. All now needed was soap, which was soon unpacked, and I settled down delightfully content, with my Franciscan surroundings so far complete.

Ere long, at 11, a cracked bell sounded from the little tower in the *cortile*. It called us to the midday meal. In the refectory were laid a little square white cloth, clean up to a point, a tumbler, a small flagon of white wine, a knife and fork, and a piece of brown bread. Three friars took their places at worm-eaten tables, rubbed and polished very occasionally, but never washed—the same which served for the platters of San Bernardino da Siena. The youngest priest read out a portion of the gospel and the life of the saint of the day, then Giovanni brought in the first course in little basins. It was composed of vegetables, a little meat among them beaten up with much oil and some garlic, and not unpalatable of its kind; the second course followed, with more vegetables done up with fruit and sugar. That completed the meal. Strict economy is a stringent requirement; any form of waste is more than an error, it is a sin in the Order. Each friar and guest is provided with a drawer under the table where he is bound to deposit every crumb of bread left over, and he is expected to clean his knife, fork, and plate with the napkin, which also serves as table-cloth. This not too clean article is washed once a week only. Be it remembered that save for the

THE REFECTORY, THE CARCERI

Fifteenth Century

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garden produce *all the food is begged*, even to the bread which is stored in a huge chest. It is broken up, mixed with water, and rolled up into small rough loaves. Mixed with a little white wine and water, it makes clean and decent food. But I confess that at first it is necessary for the stranger to forget the various processes through which the bread has passed, the various hands which have touched it, and the perhaps not too clean localities from which it originally came before it had been offered as a gift to the mendicant friar. Upon the first occasion of taking my meal I did not know the rule. Afterwards the Padre told it to me gently, "You see we are bound to poverty; waste is a sin against the poor." I had determined before coming up to the Carceri to follow the rules of the Order as far as possible. The order of food is black coffee without milk and a bit of begged bread remade in water and rebaked, at 4 A.M. At 11 came the meal that I have described, and each day with very little alteration in the menu. At 8 o'clock, after Ave Maria, again two dishes of food were provided, and the same small quantity of home-made wine—I confess a little sour, but I got used to it. No milk or butter is permitted, and any form of red meat is rarely presented. In fact we lived practically upon food which had been given to the lay brother during his weekly journey to Assisi and other towns in "quest." The whole company of the monastery combined were Padre Tomaso, Padre Silvestro, Fra Egidio the lay friar, Giovanni the cook, and Pietro the gardener, and these were my pleasant companions for a month. Unless, which sometimes occurred, expeditions were made into the country, except at meal-time and after supper, one had to be content with one's own company, or still better the company provided by the trees in the woods, which get to speak to one in their own language after a while, and the company of birds, who are quite tame and sing merrily, for they are never molested, disturbed,

or shot, all murder of animals or birds being forbidden by the Order, which insists upon the brotherhood of all nature.

This peaceful little convent stands upon one edge of the gorge which once acted as a drain from the mountain. First there is an arched resting-place provided with stone seats within the gate, beyond which no stranger is permitted to pass without the permission of the Padre Superiore—a very wise law, for presently we shall see that occasionally very undesirable strangers seek lodging, only denied to them upon grave consideration. From this atrium, the courtyard follows, quite a little place, in which there is an ancient stone well. Upon the left a door opens into the refectory, a building of the time of San Bernardino. It is like an illuminated domed cave. Once it was covered with frescoes, now scarcely distinguishable under centuries of smoke from oil-lamps and candles. It is lit by three deep openings to windows towards the south. The floor is laid with bricks. Three tables are set alongside the walls, each containing drawers into which every brother, as we have seen, deposits his knife and fork and any crumbs left over. Out of the refectory a narrow passage, quite dark save for reflected light, leads to a steep rude stair of ancient bricks worn into deep hollows upon the tread where hundreds of feet have pressed them from the fourteenth century till to-day. The hand-rail is a long bough of chestnut wood, polished so that it takes colour and light as a piece of gold. How many hands, old and young, have sought support from this ancient bit of a forest tree, who shall say?—Thousands! They tell me that this hand-rail is four hundred years old. From these steps—one cannot call it a staircase, that term is too commonplace—you are led into a high, dark, narrow passage, cut out of the rock upon one side, built up with bricks upon the other, and illuminated by one hole in the wall, through which the sun plays

fantastically upon the rough walls. Farther on a bit are the cells, some half-dozen of them, each of the same size and character as mine which I have described.

Returning to the *cortile*, we find another door which leads into the chapel; so primitive, so impressive, and yet quite small it is, not more than 30 feet by 20 feet. It is just a kind of cavern, shaped a bit, with a vaulted stone roof and an apse. One little window, half a dozen old benches and a few chairs furnish it. Black with age and smoke of candles and lamps, there is nothing to raise one's aesthetic sense except the pleasant harmony wrought by time on every tint. The altar stands at the north end of the apse upon a slab of that beautiful red stone so characteristic of Assisi. Upon an arch niche behind the altar there is a by no means undesirable fresco of the Crucifixion, which, like the rest of the walls and vault, has been neglected. It may be by Tiberio d'Assisi.

There is a wondrous sense of peace hovering over this modest church made by St. Bernardino. Perhaps most impressive it is at the time of early daylight, just after dawn. Then, when the priest celebrates under the dim light of a few candles, this cavern of darkness seems to shine in places as though it were studded with gems: what is poor looks precious, what is gloomy becomes gay, what has been dark is hopeful. To me it was an impressive scene, deeply religious, like what one imagines to have taken place in the primitive church, when secrecy was obligatory, and mystery was not worked by devices or artistic shams, was not affected, but accidental and essential, hence impressive. Then the force, the reality, of the noblest of Christian dogmas, its praise of poverty, its earnest appeal to brotherhood, seems to assume an effective reality not vulgarized by tinsel, or exaggerated by ceremonial, but lit up by the

first rays of the morning sun; and perhaps this solemn scene is made more pointedly poetic by the presence of a poor peasant or two kneeling before the Host, taking nourishment for the day's labour from what they firmly believe to be the corporeal presence of their Saviour. Human poverty and wealth of Divine light are united.

Of another kind of charm presented in the ancient chapel night after night was the Ave Maria. Often the nuns, who have their convent below the wood and towards the plain, brought up the children in their care to chant that sweet appeal to the Mother of Christians. This sympathetic service begins in daylight and ends in almost darkness, the last prayer of the day before the shadows of night have quite met in the heavens. The ancient tune chanted to the words "Ave Maria, ora pro nobis," the constant return refrain, always sung with intense fervour, while it preserves the grave simplicity so characteristic of Gregorian sacred music, bears with it a surprisingly emotional rhythm, and sung, as it mostly is, entirely by women's and children's voices, it makes an appeal to which the hardest Puritan could scarcely fail to answer. The morning mass ushers in the day from darkness to light, the evening appeal bids good-bye to the day with a prayer that is quite in harmony with the twilight and the coming of the restful hours of night, a song to the great Mother. Slowly the hooded women and the lightly-clad children pass out of the dark church like flowers closing themselves for their night's sleep; and they wend their way down the olive slopes to their homes, calm and ready for sweet sleep.

On Sundays the chapel is filled for High Mass with men, and women also, for women are allowed to attend the mass so long as they do not enter the *luogo* of the friars,

BROTHER EGIDIO AT PRAYER IN THE CHAPEL OF THE CARCERI

(*By permission of Walter J. Seton, Esq.*)

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wherein no woman has ever been seen. And that *is* a pretty sight, for the women always cover their heads in Umbria at the mass; and the head-dresses of every tint of faded silk form a mass of various colours as spring flowers, which, contrasted with the blackened walls, the brightly-lit altar, and in harmony with a stream of sunlight pouring in from the one little southern window, is never to be forgotten for the almost celestial beauty of the scene. Not less beautiful afterwards, for, mass over, the little crowd is scattered over the *cortile*, some in sunlight, some in shade, some in reflected light (of which we know nothing in England), some laughing, some letting down their copper jars to gather up water from the well—a little crowd of folk as happy as the sun is brilliant, and content with their lot. They are bred in the southern sun, are fed by it, and rejoice in it. We English experience little of the kind of *joie de vivre*, just merely the love of living, which these people feel every day, which they do account for. They are unconscious of the instrument which makes them happy, it is so spontaneous and so inevitable, the heritage of the lucky folk of the Mezzo Giorno. How *could* the cold, calculating, soul-imprisoning tenets of Puritanism have found a birthplace in the land of the sun? And who can wonder, much less deplore, that the joyous festivals of pagan times were merged into those of Christian emotion? In Italy religion is the ally of joy. In the north it is the brother of gloom. It was gloom, not joy, which marked the fall of Savonarola, who attempted Calvinism in the region of the sun, and eemed for a time to enlist him among the band of Puritans. But this was a dark cloud which gathered over his fine character. Under it there was the light of the Italian sun and the pagan joy. For Savonarola was a Platonist, a lover of beauty, and in his youth an artist. Francis was the very soul of joy. Like a

child he created his pagan "Hymn to the Sun," and, like one of the children we have just heard singing, he sang his Ave Maria, while he called all the elements, even those most destructive, and every created thing, his brother. That was not a Puritan impulse; it was a pagan one, which should Italy lose, the sun will go out of her life, and her children will wither and decay in sorrow. We shall hear by and by of other instances of the deep root that paganism left, and how it has thrown up stems which twine themselves round the other root planted over it.

Out of the chapel which has detained us with reflections upon the scenes which daily pass within it, we pass to the *Sacro Luogo*—the chamber built over and about the stone bed on which the holy Francis lay blessing its hardness, the stone or wooden neck-pillow which was his yoke in slumber, what little he took of it. This chamber is the place of greatest reverence in the monastery. Covered up with wire netting, no one may touch it. The hollowed-out stone is below the level of the pavement, or perhaps it is surrounded by a low wall. It will be seen to be scattered with copper and, here and there, silver pieces, which are in payment for masses for the souls of the donors. Now the story goes that once a year the sacred place is piously swept out, when the offerings are collected, and while the ceremony is being performed, and from the dust set in motion in the atmosphere, a sweet scent as of violets ascends and fills the chamber. Be this in fact true or created by the imagination I know not, but this I do know: while I was in the monastery the ceremony took place, and the scent of violets appeared to pervade the whole atmosphere. I give no opinion and I offer no reason concerning this occurrence, which did appeal to my sense. Imagination, rightly and

inevitably, plays such a large part in our short stay as humans upon this solid and reasonable earth, that one can hardly say where or how it ends, how much is real, how much false is the higher strain it sets going, much less where the force comes from which propels with powerful activity a mental image and creates an extra sense. Mysteries may some day be accounted for by natural causes, but until science in the name of reason blots out all imagination we may well cling with some tenacity to an experience which appears to be unlikely and even impossible. It is little use then to argue about sensation, for if we feel a sensation, it is for us at the moment a real, not a fanciful event. Even if it be only imagined, it seems to be true, and who shall say that it is not? And this view of the many miracles concerning St. Francis during his life and after his death, as related in the *Fioretti*, appears to me the only one that a student of psychology can accept, unless he is prepared to say all men are liars who dwell in the region of the Ideal. If the miracle appeared to have happened, as far as the recipient of it went, it *did* happen. And that is the only mental position in which I am able to place myself in regard to the amazing events which surrounded the one man who in all history was most in fellowship with his Master Jesus Christ. Who cannot recognize miracles except as pious forgeries had better keep away from Assisi.

We have briefly surveyed the leading features of the Carceri, what they are and how they affect the mind, what they show as well as what they indicate. Let us pass now out of the building and find our way into the beautiful woods down the steep slopes of the fruitful gorge, which was once the stony bed of a torrent sweeping down from the mountain top, often flooding the land at its base in the plain, destroying the

crops and tenements of the *contadini.* Standing in the bottom of the gorge and looking up towards its steep sides, one can visualize a torrent whose force would bring down trees with it, and even root up great boulders, so steep are the passages over which the water would run furiously from the very summit of the mountain. The legend concerning the stay of the torrent and the alteration of the course of the water-course is this; when St. Francis was living the life of a hermit in the cave which we have just seen, and his renown for piety had become the matter of common talk in the vicinity (besides, the place had long before been sacred, and was venerated), the people from the plain came to him to beg his intercession with Jesus Christ to stay the progress of the water and arrest the flood which year by year devastated the plain, destroying whole farms in the fury of its progress. St. Francis besought Jesus and Mary to pity the poor people and to arrest the floods. They were stilled and happened no more, save once or twice upon the eve of some national disaster. What was once a ravine of boulders and of rushing streams is now a fertile garden. Protected by a forest upon either side of the ravine, the garden is productive of fruit and vegetables, and never more than a little stream of water, enough to irrigate it, disturbs the peace and fertility of it or of the lands, vineyards, and farms below it in the plain. Now, instead of the roar of waters, the air is filled with the song of the nightingale and thrush, the cooing of ring-doves, the hooting of owls; and the voices of *contadini* singing their melodious *stornelli* creep up the hollow and make a paradise of music. And there is yet another music which enchants the wood when the afternoon is cool, when the sun no longer scorches. It is the merry laugh of children, who are permitted to come hither to pick wild flowers and take their evening meal accompanied by

THE CAVE OF ST. BERNARDINO IN THE GORGE, THE CARCERI

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their gentle guardians, the ladies of Sta. Chiara, who teach the ways of a good life, the laws of polite breeding, and many other refinements of knowledge and skill. Such children and their gentle teachers would delight to watch me paint. They would appear like little nymphs of the wood. Shyly concealing themselves among the undergrowth and lifting aside the low branches of trees, they would peep out as if to make sure of their safety; then, gaining courage, they would approach nearer, and finally sit down near to me, making a ring round me as of pretty spring flowers, with their thin frocks of dainty tints, their healthy colour, and fascinating little ways. One of the gracious ladies would apologize, and, lest these charges should disturb my study or interrupt my peace, would ask the question, "Do we disturb the Signorino?" The answer was always, "No, Signora," for it is pleasant while one is painting to listen to gentle chatter and also to feel the keen interest that such naïve Italian folk take in the work of an artist, whom they regard as a kind of mystic, a kind of wonderful conjuror, an alchemist, or one who is not like other people, a creator! One girl somewhere about twelve years old became very communicative. I had left my work to sit with the happy little company in the deep shade of a hot afternoon. Somehow we got talking of travel, and it must be that I tell them stories of journeys in Greece and Egypt, to which they listened with their big southern eyes as bright as diamonds, and I had to make maps of journeys for them. Then there came questions. "Tell me about Scotland," said the girl, "and why is Edinburgh called 'The Athens of the North'?" One is not so surprised at her knowing of Athens, but that she knew of Edinburgh and the likeness it is reputed to bear to the Athenian Acropolis is remarkable. Going further with talk I was amazed at the knowledge of geography shown by these children, and

I asked the Mother Superior why and how they gained it. The answer was, "Our people emigrate now, therefore we are obliged to teach them about distant countries where they may find themselves by and by; so we make geography a special study." Education in Italy has gone by leaps and bounds since I was there as a very young man, when peasants thought the London streets were paved with gold, which is untrue of course; but what they did know *is* true, that it is a dark and gloomy place where rarely the sun shines. In this way, and in games of hide-and-seek, many pleasant late afternoons were passed before Padre Tomaso and I made our daily walk in the Cypress Avenue just before Ave Maria. Truly this fragrant and cool wood seems to be a kind of joy-place, a modern Garden of Eden without the serpent and out of all kinship with evil or vulgarity, a home of loveliness under the soothing blessing of the saint who seven hundred years ago stayed the flood and brought chaos to cosmos, and so it goes on!

There are two places which tradition claims for the pretty story of St. Francis' sermon to the birds, the Carceri and Bettona. The incident may have happened in either *luogo*. I prefer to believe that it took place "In Carceri" and not at Bettona. Just outside the present buildings and very near to the caves of the Anchorites the gorge is extremely steep upon both sides, but there it is narrow. It is now spanned by a stone bridge; probably in ancient times the stems of trees formed a bridge. Growing from the stony side of the gorge and among other trees is a huge ilex of great antiquity; indeed it may well be seven hundred years old. Tradition tells that upon this tree, in its youth, birds of many kinds collected to hear the sermon of the saint. One can picture the enthusiastic little man issuing from his hard bed in the sacred cave, filled with joy as the rising sun touched

the top of the Apennines with rosy tints following so quickly after the pale violet-grey light of dawn. In imagination one can hear his voice chanting the "Canticle to the Sun," that fervent pagan hymn which might have been written by a primitive Greek to Helios; and feel the enthusiasm of his soul by the swift lifting up of his thin hands in the form of a cross, then prostrating himself upon Mother Earth, rising again to sing more joyously than before, and as a chorus, turtle-doves, larks, and thrushes joining in the praise, collecting more and more in flocks perched among the leaves of solemn ilex, the tree beloved of the worshippers of Zeus. And in that moment of enthusiasm that saint-poet, who loved all nature, called his sisters the birds to him, and as a child in its simplicity talks to its toys and believes they hear him, he admonished the gentle creatures with words most uppermost in his poet's mind of those things which had grown in his own soul, had become part of his being, and which in the overflow of his love he must convey to the little winged symbols of angelic messengers.

But as in all places in this world, evil things get over the wall sometimes and ruffle the wings of peace, or anyhow for a moment disturb calm places. The devil may take any form, I suppose—a serpent, an animal, or a human being, even a priest. One day it happened that a *cacciatore* or hunter, with all his implements of the chase, with hunting-dogs galore, came to the refectory in the early morning, reporting that a *lupo* (wolf) had been seen in the undergrowth. He said *lupo*, but I think he must have meant *volpe*, a fox. This event produced great excitement in the hunting instinct of Fra Silvestro, and Pietro the gardener was disturbed for the safety of his chickens, poor little skeletons of things at the best; so whatever old-fashioned weapons were at hand were swiftly brought out, and, headed by the *cacciatore*,

Fra Silvestro and Pietro following, the party started in grim earnest to reach the wood and bring the wily intruder to destruction. Fra Silvestro was a sight for Phil May's clever pencil. He tucked up his habit and displayed a pair of gaunt legs, and be it spoken without malice, the friar was evidently more at home with his orisons than with implements of destruction, and if truth be told his countenance became a little pale as he mounted his rusty gun the wrong way upon his shoulder, reminding one of Mr. Winkle's mistake in mounting his horse at Rochester. I was busy with my painting, so, wishing them a good chase, I was not led away to hunt, being pretty certain that either wolf or fox would prove too clever for his pursuers, and so it turned out to be. In a life where there are few excitements, every episode finds a response in general interest; and for several days the subject of talk in the district was anent the "wolf-hunt." So do some miracles grow. The devil may enter the monastery even in the garb of a priest who carries under his cloak the signs of a malefactor or proclaims it in his countenance. The priestly garb may only be provisionally adopted as a means to conceal the fact that another of more formidable and less trustworthy intent has been worn under pressure. To deny any stranger the Christian welcome to a Franciscan monastery is against the intention of the rule. Probably Francis would have greeted a well-known malefactor with gentle emotion as a brother sinner. We know that he would; but though the intention of the rule to admit whoever knocks at the gate is still in operation, the Padre Superiore has power to refuse admission into the sacred precincts, if he is in doubt of the honesty of an applicant. One morning very early I was painting in the wood when a man in a priest's dress approached me. He spoke Italian as it seemed to me with an assumed foreign accent. Notwithstanding his habit, I felt at once suspicious of his motive

in being there, not believing him to be of the cloth, but of the kind which makes a gaol-bird. He rather whined as he told me of a long trudge from Rome, of his priestly poverty and the necessity that he should find refuge for at least a night to rest himself on the road to Paris, whither he was walking to settle himself as a curé. I did not believe a word he said. In the meantime this sham priest had been admitted only into the room where poor are given food. At dinner, Padre Tomaso asked me what I thought of the man in priest's frock who had appeared. I saw that the shrewd Roman had his suspicions as I had. I answered, "Caro Signore, non è prete, è piuttosto villano." Well, to make a long story short, the convict was not admitted, but ere long after he left he was arrested and taken back to a place better suited to him, another *carcere*. So after all even now there are symbols in my little paradise of Francis' tussle with, and expulsion of, the devil from his chosen Eden. From that time Padre Tomaso insisted upon my locking myself into my cell at night, lest inadvertently a *spirito malcontento* might find his way thither for robbery. Now, it happens that once a week a barber from Assisi comes up the mountain to shave the friars, the cook, the gardener, and any guest who may desire his services, and this day is looked forward to as the day of news from the outer world. The barber was a wag, a funny bandy-legged little man with a face like a rat, very humorous in his discourse; he was, as barbers are wont to be, in possession of every piece of news of events, true or untrue, which might have transpired, or did in fact, occur during the six days of his absence. His accomplishments were many. He cut and shaved; he bled; he was an apothecary and doctor to many a peasant's household. Apropos of his usefulness in the matter of bleeding, the following episode, eminently Franciscan in its matter

of faith as well as humour, came about. The lay-brother, Brother Egidio, had been absent upon the quest with the draught-ass. I was painting in the courtyard two nights after he left when knocks at the gate sounded twice. The porter Giovanni was away, and I was in charge. Opening the gate, there stood Fra Egidio apparently doubled up with pain. Upon the back of the ass had been placed a very heavy sack of flour, heavier than any one man ought to have attempted to lift. "What has happened, *caro* Egidio?" said I. I wish all my readers understood Italian, for the story must lose something of its charm in a translation from the concise vernacular. "Ah, Signorino, it was a miller that made me break my back. I begged in the name of Christ for flour, that we might make fresh bread, and he looked ugly at me, saying, 'Pig of a monk, take a sackful, but I will not put it upon the ass.' The sack is heavy; look, Signorino. It seemed more than I could lift, but Christ and Mary gave me strength to try; but as I lifted it I fell, and the sack fell upon my back, and I am broken and shall die. Seeing this misfortune which had come to me, the miller's heart became softened towards me by the will of God, and taking the sack he, being a man of great strength, laid it easily over the back of the ass and helped me to rise, and I blessed him, though I am no priest, and kindly the rough man bid me a good journey. From the miller's house to here is near a day's journey. I am in pain, *caro* Signore." The poor fellow could eat no supper, and went to his cell and to bed. I followed him ere long, and found him lying down in extreme agony. "God has brought to me this evil to try my faith. He has caused me to be wounded that I might better know the suffering of Jesus. God will cure me!" "But," I said, "*caro* Egidio, you must let me call a doctor." "Nay, nay! God will cure me!" However, upon the following morning the barber appeared upon his weekly visit. It took me time to

read to Egidio a sufficiently convincing homily which was to prove to him that God had sent us surgeons to cure ills, and how Francis, when he was in great pain from his eyes, sought help from a surgeon. So the barber was at last admitted, and having examined the poor fellow, pronounced it to be a case for leeches. After having applied honey to the place where the pain was acute, we adjusted the leeches and left Egidio under a promise to lie quiet. Returning ere long we noticed that Egidio's face had changed. "Non mi duole più"—"I am in no more pain." When the barber made his examination, he found that not one of the leeches had taken. "*Lo so*" (I know), said Egidio, "my prayers have been answered by God's will. Signorino and Signor Barbiere, after all God is the best surgeon." And the man was well, a case of faith-healing indeed. This little story is one that might have found its way into the *Fioretti*, so characteristic is it of the thirteenth century, and of the Franciscan spirit. Fra Egidio was a dear fellow and an agreeable companion, though he could neither read nor write. We took many walks together, and what he liked best was that I should tell him stories of my travels, and draw maps in the dust of the road to explain the geography to him. He liked to hear of Arabs, and asked me if all black men were not in the service of the devil, which I assured him was not the case. His wonder was most excited when I told him I had crossed the sea. He had not seen the sea, and could not imagine it, so constantly the request was made to tell him more about the "great waters" and the "great houses" that float upon them. Fra Egidio was a character straight out of the thirteenth century, as blissful as a child, as honest as a shepherd's dog, and as ignorant as a baby. Another occasional companion in my wanderings on Mount Subasio was a gay little Spaniard who made occasional visits to the Carceri, a real "Nero", a bigot of obstinate proportions.

Early one morning soon after daylight we started off on foot to attain the height of the mountain whereon, we had been told by my friend the *cacciatore*, Roman shepherds had encamped themselves, having moved up slowly from the dried-up Campagna of Rome to find fresh and healthful grass for their flocks. They came hither every year, finding up on the top of the mountain fine and luscious turf, which fattens their flocks for the winter season. The round-headed Mount Subasio is carpeted with exquisite grass, like that growing upon our South Downs. When the Roman grass dries up like hay under the burning sun of the shade-lacking Campagna, companies of *pastori* slowly make their journey along such heights where they know fresh grass is to be found even in the height of summer, till they come to Subasio, where they feed their flocks. After a steep walk we found ourselves upon an undulating plateau exactly like our Sussex Downs. There were dotted about the well-known signs of shepherds, the conical huts of primitive design called *capanne*. Wood-smoke rose from the little encampment, hence we knew that a kid was probably being roasted upon the proverbial three sticks for the early mid-day meal. Familiar signs were not wanting—the guardians of the flock. The great white dogs soon became aware that strangers were not far distant. They are often very dangerous to strangers, and their owners keep a sharp look-out upon them. Rushing down towards us came some half-dozen of these semi-wild animals of beautiful whiteness, but with red eyes; immediately their masters knew that we were the cause of the sudden disturbance of the peace, they called the dogs back. This action upon their part, being supported by a shower of stones from us, scattered the belligerent force, and in a few moments I was patting the soft white head of one of the monsters that a few moments before would have laid me low. We were immediately made the guests

of four stalwart shaggy shepherds coated and breeched in goat- and sheep-skins, fine fellows indeed, almost black with exposure to all weathers, reminding one very closely of the pictures of Robinson Crusoe. This episode reminded me of a pretty idyll in which I took part some years before in the Roman Campagna. Upon a brilliant morning just after sunrise, I started, well loaded with sketching-traps, from Rome out of the Porta San Giovanni to find my way along the Via Appia, which I left on my right soon after passing the Bosco Santo at the fountain of Egeria where stands to this day a little ancient temple to Bacchus. Towards midday, when I had walked some three miles to the east of the Via Appia, an incident similar to the one I have just mentioned occurred. Dogs came on towards me, but were swiftly called off by a splendid specimen of a Sabine shepherd. "Take no fear, Signorino; while I am here those brutes will not hurt you. It is near midday; the sun scorches; will you take shade in my cool *capanna*?" With the now humble dogs following us, uttering an occasional growl to assert the duty of watchfulness, we entered the *capanna*. What a place! In an instant of time I was back into the age of the kings, and I knew that Romulus had lived, and am sure that he lived in a hut exactly like this one. A conical building, erected upon a stone foundation and solidly thatched, rose to the height of perhaps eighteen feet, and was built with tall stems of trees meeting at the apex over the centre of a circle, with a hole in it to let out the smoke of a fire which was just lighted upon a stone hearth, over which was suspended the body of a kid cooking for the midday dinner. Exquisitely clean wooden bowls and cans to hold fresh-made *ricotta* were scattered in picturesque disorder about the floor. Against the inner surface of the wall of this circular building, all along it in niches, were beds of straw covered over with sheep-skins, quite tempting places to take rest in after a hot day's walk. Presently,

to the number of six, other shepherds than Beppino, their chief, came in. With graceful salutations I was asked to share their meal, which was being swiftly prepared, and I never had a better one. Roast kid, excellent hard bread dipped in first-rate Roman wine, plenty of goat's cream, and frothy snow-white *ricotta*. A dinner for Romulus! About Beppino there was something which distinguished him from the others, a gravity not in the least gloomy, but reserved and kingly, and I came to the reason of it presently. Walking with him in the evening I noticed a book with worn edges peeping from his pocket. "You read, Beppino?" "Si, Signore. This is my 'Bibbia'!" It was a well-worn edition of Virgil's *Bucolics*. Beppino had been taught to love Virgil by a priest of Subiaco! I took to this man, remaining with the shepherds for two nights. I wandered with Beppino by starlight. "Look, Signorino, there are the lights of Rome. I have never been there. They tell me it is a great city, that at night-time it is as light as by day. The stars, the sun, and the moon give me light; I want no more." This grave shepherd loved his sheep, he knew them, each one of them; he told the weather to come by their actions; he knew their instincts were right. They wandered much and were restless when rain was coming, searching for the sweetened grass which the rain would bring. He told the stories of the stars; he cast horoscopes; he knew the name and use of every herb of the field. He had no religion other than of nature. A pantheist and a pagan, Beppino was a kind of Corydon. He had all the pagan superstitions; he spoke little and low in the high noontide, "for then the gods sleep." I was sorry to part with him, and promised to come back ere long. And I did go back two years after, but only to find that my Theocritan shepherd had joined his forefathers in the

shades. Little events of this kind unite past times with present, create and emphasize continuity of human instincts, which seem to defy time and make travel so intensely interesting and invigorating to a citizen of the world. One need not go to the palace, far otherwise, to discover kings, or to cities and towns to discover the kernel of enduring civilization. One finds it, if one wills to do so, in the backbone of the world, an ancient peasantry who have watched, and still watch, the progress of the stars. And one also finds intellectual receptivity sometimes where one might reasonably expect quite otherwise. One may discover instincts in men which have been concealed by convention, diluted by prejudice, or so far and deeply hidden that only some lucky chance of a new and sympathetic contact reawakens what might be suggested as the revival of a dormant sense. My brother-friars liked nothing better after supper than sitting out with their guest in the cool evenings under the stars. Night after night we did this. It was not with entire confidence of success, and not without some fear of wounding susceptibilities by the relation of myths and stories from old mythology, that I told them Greek tales. Of course one had to be careful, but not so careful as a Puritan might imagine, in relating stories in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. I don't believe that one could do so at all without creating revulsion in the respectable unimaginative and unemotional Englishmen of the same class to which my friar friends belong. Whereas the unimaginative Englishmen would see the undesirable, or what would appear to be so to them, the members of a southern race at once saw the poetry, the nature in the idea, and its symbolical significance. Things which appear to northerners to be not far removed from the unclean, at any rate superfluous, to the southerners are natural elements, or inevitable consequences

which are justified by habit, being irresistible, and consequently they are appropriate in application to art and letters. Every southerner in this respect is a poet. It is not so much the thing spoken of or alluded to, as the use to which it has been put to justify or explain some great true underlying idea, as a symbol does, which commands his attention and stimulates his imagination. Some occult idea which at its root or base is transcendental is seized and justified by the warm-brained southerner. The southerner is a Materialist as well as an Idealist; he is to the backbone anthropomorphic. The religion of his adoption or training frames ideas in matter. The northern Puritan separates matter and idea, because he is not a Materialist or an Idealist, but a dealer in matter of fact more than in allusion and metaphor, which appeal little to him. Happily the Catholic religion as received in the south has never lost its primary touch with paganism: it is of the same stock; it did not destroy, but made use of the elder gods, and Pan is not dead, he is about still. So that to appeal to the modern southern mind through pantheism is no novelty, for it is already prepared for by irrevocable antecedents. But, though I did know of this disposition of the southern mind, I confess I was surprised that the myth, so abstract and, as it appears to be to us, so essentially pagan, of the birth of Aphrodite should have been at once seized in the bearings of its symbolism to contain a likeness to the story of the divine birth of Mary; Aphrodite and Mary, to the southern mind, being Mothers of Love—both of miraculous birth, both types of union between great forces, the sky, the sea, and the earth, symbols of the union of powerful agencies. Be it remembered that the little audience to whom I related that and other pagan myths were Franciscan friars who very easily might have discerned indelicacy in the ancient stories, but who in fact

only saw their applicability to their own faith, and received them not as novelties but as sequences perfectly natural and perfectly understandable. This instance of the pagan mind in the followers of the Catholic faith is by no manner of means the only one that has occurred in my intimate association with Italian people, especially those of the middle rank and peasant class. The very high and childlike intelligence which distinguishes the Italian people renders them charming companions, and, if one is so minded, renders it practicable to be free of speech with them, knowing that they are far too intelligent to misconstrue one's meaning. The Arab delights in symbols, so does the southern and meridional Italian. This inherent quality of apprehension is where the poetry of both races abides and is rendered vivid and artless.[1]

Padre Tomaso came from the Maremma. He was an unlearned but extremely acute Roman priest, pleasant to talk to when his somewhat detached Roman reserve had been relaxed under the influence of spontaneous humour. Padre Tomaso had been rector of Armenzano upon the other side of the mountain. There was to be a festival in that *paese* of his rectorship, and very courteously he invited me to go with him and to enjoy under his auspices the hospitality of his late flock. Needless to say, I acceded with alacrity to this opportunity of entering into ingenuous Umbrian life in an obscure township, under such desirable guardianship. We were to ride there on three asses, the property of the Carceri—Padre Tomaso, I, and Pietro the gardener, who came as an attendant to our steeds, being also a dry and humorous companion. Soon after daylight on a

[1] The Arab is a mystic; he is not anthropomorphic. Sailing upon the Nile a few years ago, near El Kab, the sun was extremely burning for the month of March. I said to my boatman, "Did it ever strike you that the sun is the eye of God?" "La, la" (No, no), was his response. Then presently came the noble answer to my silly question, "Howarcha, how can the eye see its *own centre*?"

glorious summer morning we were mounted and off towards the summit of the mountain, the portly Padre leading the van, for he knew every inch of the way, which to my eyes appeared extremely intricate. First we were climbing slowly up the steep and rocky ways, leaving cultivated land for miles behind us, above the zone in which the olive will grow. No forest trees gave an inch of shade, and only little scrub oaks and junipers relieved a scene of desolation which this wind-swept mountain assumes in summer as well as in winter. When St. Francis crossed it in his youth on his journey to Gubbio, robbed and stripped of his ragged habit, thrown into a snowdrift, which may be twenty feet deep in winter, the patient saint praised Brother Snow, Wind, and Frost with his persistent joyfulness. The exposed surface of the mountain receives excessive heat in summer and intense cold in winter when storms of wind, hail, and snow render this highland impassable—indeed carts have been known to be blown right over, so great is the force of the wind, which often reaches to a hurricane. This August morning proved indeed to provide a sun-bath ; not a breath of treacherous wind marred the enjoyment of his direct rays. Very slowly our little cavalcade moved on in the shimmering heat, now descending, then ascending, steep stony watersheds, passing over moors where short heather grew in abundance, the country as deserted as the Arabian desert. We made our way silently. After some three or four hours of pretty stiff riding we looked down from a ragged crag. Suddenly a fertile cup of land came into view, enclosed by little hills upon whose slopes grew every kind of fruit-tree, vine, and vegetable, a perfect paradise of gracious agriculture. The area of this Eden is small, perhaps not more than eight miles in entire area, but it presented the perfection of cultivation in the very centre of a wind-blown arid region of grim grandeur. Nest-

ling at the foot of the slope as we looked down towards it, lay a little walled town, a tiny place, a kind of toy town, but perfectly appointed for olden times to protect the inhabitants. This was the Paese of Armenzano, into which I was told no Englishman had entered in the memory of man. A little crowd was collected at the gate to receive the former and evidently much-beloved Rector, and perhaps some curiosity might have been roused regarding the *forestiero* who came thither as the guest and friend of Padre Tomaso. Evidently this was to be a day of fête. The *contadini* had left their fields for a holiday, and were in a mood to enjoy even the slightest accident of merriment, so typical of the warm-hearted sun-inspired Umbrians. Our steeds were presently stabled, and we walked up the main street to a large mediæval building, the property and habitation of the chief landowner of the community. The large room upon the first floor, with heavily beamed ceiling and deep-recessed chimney, presented a medley of occupants—cocks and hens, cats, a lean dog or two on the look-out for scraps, many children of various ages to one in a cradle, buxom ladies of that good-humoured type one meets in every *paese* in Italy, and shy girls hiding their faces behind the neckerchief (in Arab fashion) at the approach of a stranger, not without some flirtatious coyness; the whole making a picture which would have delighted a Dutch painter, who would have presented the character of the scene but missed its beauty. At the end of this huge room was a long table spread for the coming feast. Ample *fiaschoni* of wine were very prominent, and a further supply of the joy-giving nectar was evident upon an old worm-eaten dresser. Evidently we were to be given a great feast. Presently came the host followed by his friends, *cacciatori*, friars, priests, and landowners, and we proceeded to do justice to the spread of good things; and it was a glorious feast. The friars made up for their fasts indeed.

Wine flowed like water, hence merrier and merrier grew the company till the time of speech-making came. The Rector was toasted in a flagon of wine, I with another, and many were the homely or eloquent speeches. Hospitality could not be carried to a fine art with greater grace than every one, man and woman, adopted. It was long past midday when the company began to separate or disappear into various chambers of the spacious building. "The Signore would like a siesta?" "Indeed, yes" was my immediate response, for the hot ride, plenty of food, and a liberal allowance of wine, created commands from Somnus which I was eager to obey. Opening a door, the hospitable lady showed me into a closed room. When I had become accustomed to the darkness, I descried a huge bed, upon which lay three well-nourished priests already curled up in the arms of the sleepy god. There was nothing for it but I must make a fourth occupant, which I did, and slept during a short enchanting hour. But there was more yet to be done, and it was not long before the voice of Padre Tomaso called to me to walk with him, first to his church, and then to the bedside of the oldest woman of the Armenzano, and the youngest, born that morning. I was to be introduced to the oldest and youngest inhabitant of his primitive parish. As evening gave signs of its approach, we made a start to return to the Carceri accompanied by quite a group of other travellers returning to their various *paese*. We rode homewards, parting from our friends as each one found himself in the road or way to his destination. Finally we were proceeding alone, and Padre Tomaso silently led us on the way. Through the sunset we passed to twilight, then to dark night, when we had to beware of steep places, indeed to walk over the water-courses which we had ridden over in the daylight. And it was midnight before we

reached the Carceri after a day spent in a thoroughly Italian fashion, on which hospitality was exercised in friendly fashion, in exquisite and very varied scenery, among an industrious and simple people thriving in a veritable little Eden.

During my stay "In Carceri" the eclipse of the sun took place, which event caused some anxiety, the friars shutting themselves up in their cells for very terror lest the wrath of Heaven was to be poured forth, and perchance the world cease to be. It certainly was a very solemn sight. Absolute silence, breathless silence, not the flutter of a bird or a movement of air disturbed the momentary complete obscuration of the sun. The sky was quite cloudless, and, as the eclipse became almost total, the corona was manifested in violet and orange variously-shaped tongues of light, which seemed to proceed from the back of the shadowed sun. It cannot be said that darkness took the place of light, or even that the temporary absence of direct light produced the appearance of twilight. The peculiarity of the effect was the absence of shadows and the extraordinarily deep purple blue of the sky opposite the sun. Under and around the sun the colour of the atmosphere was like copper, and the plain of Umbria under this strange light partook of the same tint. While the eclipse lasted, not more than a few minutes, there came a strange chill in the atmosphere, birds hurried to take shelter in the oaks, and the general hush of all nature was, if not alarming, extremely solemn. That the phenomena produced positive fear in the minds of the friars was evident, and not unnatural. They live alone up there in the mountain in the atmosphere of miraculous events which to them were real. They no more doubt that St. Francis arrested the flood from Subasio, that he cast the devil out of his cell and over the precipice, than I and my readers doubt that the sun rose this morning. This fear or dread was made evident by

the locking and bolting of every wooden shutter in the cells, and more than that, for in the deep silence one sound only struck the dumb atmosphere, the little bell of the convent, which rang intermittently and seemingly nervously. The habit of ringing bells in moments of agitation produced by thunder and other ominous or dangerous signs of meteorological disturbance is common to all monasteries. The sound of the bell is supposed to keep devils away; the demon of the storm hates the sound of a church bell, and no doubt the bell-ringing during the eclipse was prompted by a similar idea that the efficacy of its sound dedicated to worship would stay a peril or frighten some dark fiend who might be on mischief bent while the sun was dark. Omens are still firmly believed in by *contadini* folk, whose special saints watch over them and their crops. This interesting subject I must reserve for a place in a future chapter.

With great regret to me the time came when I had to break away from the absolute peace of the Carceri, from that kind of concentration which is provided by solitude, from that kind of freedom which is the best: obedience to rules, to times and seasons, and to a mental discipline which induces little bits of one's nature to peep out, concealed since boyhood by the intricate mazes which convention and society have planted and called by the name of civilization. Novel experiences bristle up the mind, they feed that healthy inquisitive ardour which too often disappears with youth, they promote a larger vision in which a multitude of sympathies are aroused and stimulated, if not re-created, and one goes back to a more or less monotonous routine of life refreshed, and regarding other environments, other modes of life than have been just customary, with greater respect; hence a larger brotherhood is called up into an imagination vitalized and

more generous. In a period of happy solitude the sensibilities are strengthened, nature speaks with strange distinctness, or rather we comprehend her language more definitely. The pantheistic element, which I believe to be in every one of us, takes courage. Sounds are no longer commonplace, they assume definite meanings, are connected with ideas, and suggest how strong and tenacious our senses are to receive messages from the merry whisperings of busy streams, the ever-differing music of song-birds; and the tales which the wind tells as it passes violently or gently through branches and leaves, over moors or through forest, become intelligible, not as told in words, but as communicating subtle emotions outside the region of words. People who pass their lives in cities *must* be artificial, *must* lose the bloom which a truer natural life would provide. Jostling day after day against one's fellow-creatures may cultivate a kind of worldly wisdom. It may breed diplomatists and politicians, and literary hacks who carve and cut up humanity with a cynical knife under a false impression that the only study worthy of intelligence is to subject every feeling to analysis, dismiss spontaneity, and tune every act to the chord of Reason. The product of a kind of cynical root inseparable from the seed sown in the sour soil of the slum and fashionable quarter of great cities is artificial—it can be nothing else. Heartless analysis claims that it presents "Life." No doubt the cynical writer does present a "life," but it is only that part of it which exists in matter, a corpse out of which the spirit has flown, if it ever were there. As an anatomist does, the cynical analyst carves dead bodies, and tells us he is reaching essentials; instead, he is only playing to the gossip and the morbid inquisitor.

To know Italy one must leave English prejudice behind,

and enter into the essence and temperament of her people. To do this the language must be mastered, because the class which represents real Italy knows no other tongue than its own. All nations have their national faults or differences. Upon acquaintance with her people the large-minded student will find that imagination plays a large part in the Italian temperament. In that respect it differs from the English. When it is known, excess of emotions is forgiven in a people of extreme sensitiveness, hence very proud, yet quick to apprehend, very generous, but of strong passions, vigorous haters, and impassioned lovers! The winter tourist can never know Italy or its people; he may get a superficial smattering of their achievements as artists, but he will never realize how they came to be great artists. The traveller mostly goes to Italy at the wrong time of year. The real life of Italy exists in agricultural, not in factory districts. The joyous nature of the people is created by their sun. The Italian is awake in summer; he sleeps much in winter. In this respect he is like the Oriental.[1] His indoor life is far from comfortable; he is not made for it; outdoor life suits him, and brings out his best qualities. When the northerner is sleeping late into the morning in summer, the Italian has done the fourth of a day's work. To enjoy what Italy can give, one must be up with the dawn, one must face the heat of the day out of doors, if possible reposing during the two or three hottest hours in the shade of a fig-tree or, when it can be found, of an ilex wood. The provident traveller can turn one day into two of eight hours each, and have plenty of time for repose. We were always up at dawn and at work soon after "In Carceri." Rarely if ever did we hear the

[1] "I do not go to my work to-day," will say the Cairo workman; "it is too cold, so I stay in my bed," and he does do so, with his head entirely wrapped up.

THE ROAD FROM THE CARCERI TO ASSISI

(*By permission of Stanley Baldwin, Esq., M.P.*)

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clock tell ten P.M., and so the time flew fast, and many things were accomplished, and when the time came to say adieu to a really happy time, regret was unmixed. But it had to come! I had to turn my back to the Carceri! To bid adieu to my friends was by no means pleasant, and, as I looked back when a quarter of a mile away towards Assisi, Padre Tomaso, Fra Silvestro, Fra Egidio, Pietro, and Giovanni were still standing in the gateway, presently to return to their daily and hourly routine, but I knew they would not quite forget the Inglese. And what a change of circumstances was for me! A festival in Venice to the memory of John Ruskin. Speeches, dinners, luncheons, functions of many kinds, regal and others, at which I felt like a fish out of water, and wished myself back in prison. Perhaps few men longed more than I to be back there, in a prison-house by name, but in reality a castle of liberty. But I was to return to the region of asceticism ere long, not to the Carceri, but to San Damiano, the scene of Francis' earliest retreat before he grasped the ethical meaning of his mission, or had begun to follow the destiny it commanded.

CHAPTER III

SAN DAMIANO

San Damiano was a chapel in ruins just where the mountain slope begins to reach the plain. Francis had been a soldier; he had been a prisoner; he had armed himself as a knight-errant; his delicate imagination had been saturated with chivalrous French poetry. He had been gay; he had loved luxury and boon companionship; he had led a company of youths singing at night through the narrow little streets of Assisi. His father, Pietro di Bernardone, was a merchant in cloth and stuffs. He made visits to France on business, and was reputed to be the richest man in Assisi. His son he named after France, calling him Francesco. Italy was visited at this time and before by celebrated troubadours, who, like the ancient Greek minstrels, wandered over the peninsula from court to court telling tales of love and chivalry. They sang of knightly deeds, the "Chansons de Geste," and of King Arthur and his knights, "La gaya scienza," the gay science, of song, of tournaments, of *joie de vivre*, of gorgeous apparel. Such imaginative tales made an early appeal to the highly-strung genius which was evident in St. Francis from his youth, if we are to believe Thomas of Celano, his earliest biographer.

Evidently Francis was from the first a leader of men,

LOOKING TOWARDS SPELLO FROM THE GARDEN OF SAN DAMIANO

EARLY MORNING

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possessing an ardent spirit which little liked restraint, excepting when it was self-imposed. There is no vice recorded of him, indeed it appears that levity of talk or unseemly stories gave Francis instant offence, and from gaiety he swiftly grew grave, perhaps stern. The virtuous fibre was as strong in him as the joyous impulse. However mistaken his friends were as to the direction that his genius might take, Francis was accepted as a leader among them from his childhood. Francis was to become a "great prince," but not in costly apparel or in highly-wrought armour, nor was he to make war against his fellow-men with arms of steel, but with weapons of love. His costly armour was given away to a poor knight. He was to emancipate himself from every luxury, to eat ashes with his food, to take Poverty as his spouse, and fight the fight of love against hate in his Master's name.

San Damiano was St. Francis' first place of retreat from his father's home and from ways of a world which had become of no account save in as much as it exalted and praised the fame of his Master's sufferings. Hence the first task he set himself was to restore the chapel of San Damiano, which is mentioned as early as 1030, but in the thirteenth century was a ruin, being served by one poor priest. Within the church, suspended over the altar, was a painted wooden crucifix of Byzantine craftsmanship. Before this effigy Francis prayed, seeking a voice, a command. It is related that Jesus spoke to Francis out of the wooden figure, even as God's voice is related to have proceeded from the burning bush. Francis received his mission in words to this effect: "Build up my house, Francis; it is tottering." The young impulsive man took the words literally and applied himself at once to restore the chapel. Full of the spirit of the words, burning with the enthusiasm

that only genius knows, Francis set to work to rebuild the ruined chapel, a costly operation. He stole the money from his father's shop in the shape of rolls of cloth. Packing them upon the back of his father's horse, he made his way to Foligno, some twelve miles on the road towards Rome. There he sold the goods and the horse. With the money thus obtained, Francis quickly returned to San Damiano, where he found the priest as before, seated outside the chapel. He poured out the sum of money into the lap of the priest, and dedicated it to the restoration of the chapel. Then Francis betook himself into a cave hard by, so Thomas of Celano tells. I have searched and can find no record of that cave. Pietro and his mother Pica missed their son, and set search for him, but Francis was well hidden. The priest however was found, and immediately restored the money to Pietro which Francis had brought to him. Francis had now renounced the world for good and all. But he reappeared in Assisi ere long as a beggar, as *un pazzo*, a madman, the people said. The splendidly-attired youth of but a month before was now a half-naked beggar. He was hooted and stoned in the very streets in which he had been a leader of gay companions, and he the gayest. Presently he was to be a leader of gay companions in another sense, gay because they had taken Poverty to wife, that they might understand and follow in deed the teaching of their Master. Taken prisoner by Pietro, Francis was led home bleeding and covered with dirt. They had turned upon their former leader, those youths of Assisi. They howled at him, made fun of his knighthood, and their attacks were followed by an equally furious one, for Pietro, mad with rage and wounded pride, seized his son. Dragging him, clad in a bundle of rags, he threw him into the cellar of his house, and

there locked him in and left him. Francis was "In Carceri," but joy filled him there, for had not his Master been ill-treated? His real life was beginning; joy filled his soul now that he suffered. But Pica opened the door and set her son at liberty, and Francis immediately returned to San Damiano. Pietro, returning from one of his journeys on business, found the cellar empty and the captive free. He appealed first to the law, then to the Church, to restore his son to him. Francis would obey no summons from the *Sindaco* or civil authority, and he refused to return. "I am a free man, and serve the Holy Spirit of God," was his reply. Pietro then appealed to the bishop, who commanded Francis to restore all the goods in his possession belonging to his father. Then Francis stripped himself of his garments and appeared naked, save for a girdle of hair-cloth about his loins. "In the past I called Pietro di Bernardone father, now I shall say, 'Our Father who art in Heaven.' All that my earthly father gave me I return to him." His naked body was then clothed in a tattered cloak, the property of the bishop's gardener. Francis drew upon it with a piece of chalk the symbol of his whole life, The Cross. Happy and singing like a lark in the sky, Francis swiftly ran down the hill to his beloved retreat, the cave near the ancient chapel of San Damiano. Here he did not remain, but to seek a more secure retreat at a greater distance from the city of his gay youth, he went up the steep sides of Subasio to Il Carceri, and from there on to Gubbio. It was on this journey that Francis was assailed by thieves and thrown naked into a snowdrift.

After a while Francis returned to San Damiano and began the restoration of the chapel, working as a mason. To provide stone and lime, he set out to beg. He begged in the market-place of Assisi and elsewhere. People made fun of him, but they

also gave. Not only stones and mortar did he beg, but broken meat, for he had *no* money, and was never to possess any !

It was at this time that Francis came to minister to the lepers at the hospital between San Damiano and Portiuncula and his renown as a saintly man grew apace. Having finished the restoration of the chapel of San Damiano, Francis set to work to restore the Church of St. Pietro within the walls of Assisi. It is not known how much remains of St. Francis' restoration in either case, nor has it been ascertained to what an extent he carried it. Cristofani, the learned historian, thinks that Francis made few additions to the chapel of San Damiano, while Henry Thode thinks that the Gothic portion, which is the little nave, was erected by Francis, but that the apse is of an older date. After completing whatever he did in restoration of these two churches, Francis went to reside at Portiuncula, now named Santa Maria degli Angeli. There he set to work to restore the little church which still stands within, and sheltered by, the great cathedral built by Vignola. The little church is said to have been erected by pilgrims upon their return from the Holy Land in 352; anyhow it belonged to the Benedictines when St. Francis began his restoration. It would seem, then, that Francis took the message from the crucifix in San Damiano literally, not figuratively. At this early stage of his career he was chiefly employed as a mason, a builder perhaps, and in the larger sense an architect. Francis also renovated the church of Santa Maria del Vescovado in Assisi, a very ancient church, ruined, as so many of them are, or almost ruined, by the would-be-classical architects of the sixteenth century, who were in truth barbarians that did as much harm to the noble remains of ancient architecture in Italy as the invasions of the Goths and Huns had done before them. Bad

luck to those talented but misguided men who worked by measurement and imagined by imitation ; who from first to last exhibited little else than cold scholarship which soon destroyed any spontaneity once perhaps theirs. This, then, is an epitomized account of the early years of the great saint, which has been gathered from many books. It was needful to introduce my readers to San Damiano by way of history, and I have done so as briefly as possible. To know more, Sabatier's, Jörgensen's, and Henry Thode's lives of St. Francis must be read. But there was another who played a still greater part in this romantic retreat : the spiritual friend and follower of St. Francis—the Lady Chiara. Born in 1194, she was the daughter of Favorini dei Scifi. Her mother belonged to the ancient noble family of the Fiumi,—she came from Sterpeto, one of the several castles in the vicinity and within the Commune of Assisi, which protected the mother city from the rapacity and aggression of democratic and republican Perugia. The Count of Sasso Rocca lived in a fortified palace near to the Porta Vecchia, according to Locatelli, the biographer of Sta. Chiara. There were five children of Favorini and Ortalana—four daughters, Penenda, Chiara, Agnese, and Beatrice, and one son, Boso. Chiara appears to have been a pious child, much devoted to the lives of ascetics, hermits, saints, and martyrs. It is reputed of her that even in tenderest years she submitted to the physical discomfort of a hair garment close to her skin. According to her biographers she was singularly beautiful, the possessor of a great shower of golden hair, presently to be shorn at Portiuncula by Francis when she joined his order. Upon the return of Francis from Rome, where he went in 1210, he preached and attracted large congregations in the church of San Rufino. Silvestro and Rufino, friars minor of the order of Franciscans, were related to

Chiara, and through them Francis had already heard of her saintly character. In Lent in 1212, according to the *Fioretti*, Chiara first heard the voice of Francis from the pulpit of San Rufino; he spoke of voluntary poverty as the highest state, of the nakedness and poverty of the crucified Jesus, and of the insults offered to Him, which words so inflamed her soul that she was compelled to cast off all worldly ways and join those of the brothers of poverty. With loving care, as if she were going as a bride to her wedding, Chiara adorned herself with all her jewels, in her finest brocades, plaiting her abundant hair and winding it round her head. She was the most beautiful spectacle to be seen upon that brilliant Palm Sunday when she was to become a bride. "In turba dominarum splendore festivo puella pervadians." Chiara passed over olive branches strewn over the streets of Assisi in her progress to mass. This was to be the last time Chiara would pray by the side of her mother. Emotion overcame the young girl of sixteen summers, and she wept. It was the moment of her parting from family and friends. She was to be an outcast from the outer world ere to-morrow dawned. Deep indeed must have been her mixed emotions—one of leaving all earthly ties and earthly love, the other of joining another tie, to her far closer and purer, and to her more real. Chiara knew what she was doing. No one else save Bishop Guido, Francis, and Bona Guelfucci were aware that the next night, under cover of darkness, she would take her flight from the world to that higher region for which she was prepared, which was to her a reality rather than a vision. In the darkness she fled down the mountain side with the swiftness of a stream rushing to find its home in the great ocean. She was leaving one life to attain a higher. The brothers of poverty and their captain knew of her coming.

They ventured out of the wood which concealed Portiuncula, the "little portion," carrying torches. As Chiara rushed through the olive woods, struggling in the rough roads to find her way among intricate paths, in terror of pursuers, she made her way half in joy at finding freedom, half in fear of the darkness, an emotion common to imaginative Italian folk. Presently she saw the flickering light of torches in the deeply wooded landscape, going in and out like fireflies, but moving towards her. Then to her heart there came the sense of final delivery, and she knew she was not far from the place of her desires. Soon, joining the little band of brothers, Chiara knelt before the image of Mary in the Chapel of the "little portion," and there, prone and in adoration of the Mother of Love, Chiara took the vow of poverty. Her beautiful hair was shorn, her jewelled robe exchanged for a coarse monastic habit, and her feet were shod with wooden sandals. Chiara was no longer of the world, she was only in it. Every woman must know what this sister of hers suffered—never to be a mother, never to hear the whisper of man's love, to be shut away always from her mother's voice, to part with her physical beauty and its adornments, to become poor, despised for a time by her sex, hated by her father and brother. And yet Chiara did all this for the love of an unseen God who, she believed, had chosen this vocation for her for the good and well-being of her fellow-creatures, not only then, but for generations to come. It was not the moment of her death, this hour of separation ; it was the beginning of her life. Chiara might have lived long and respected, never to have been heard of in future times. Her renunciation crowned this woman for all time with a diadem made of jewels more glorious than diamonds or pearls. Jewels wrought of thanksgiving from countless hearts of suffering men and women even to the far ends of the

earth. Ere long her sister Agnes joined Chiara. But the "little portion" of Sta. Maria degli Angeli was no abiding-place for Chiara, her sister, and other women who were soon to join the community, and to them the Camaldolites of Monte Subasio presented San Damiano, where Chiara lived for forty-one years, much of that time in great physical suffering, and at the end of her trials quite unable to leave her bed. In this little corner of Umbria, whence sprang a heroic race of mothers of the poor, is a tiny little building, a tiny little garden, still retaining its original name and still a conventual, where Francis first, Chiara after, established the Orders which, ere twenty years had passed, filled the world with amazement, startled the Vatican, shook the consciences of cardinals and prelates, and did much, if not all, in those times to save from disintegration the Church of Rome, whose dignitaries had fallen into simoniacal ambition or vicious indulgence. They added a buttress to Christianity and a noble fame to a weakened cause. Francis fulfilled the mission given to him by the voice from the crucifix over the altar in San Damiano, "Rebuild my church, which is tottering." Chiara was a mother to her nuns. She waited on them at table, she nursed them in sickness, she soothed their dying hours, and there her first sisters lie buried in a little sacristy between her *coro* and the ancient apse of the church. Chiara was an artist—most people were in those days. She embroidered altar-cloths, and did simple needle-work, making raiment for her poor, who came in flocks for her blessing, help, and consolation. One day the courage of the race of warriors from whom she came was roused in Sta. Chiara, who was not always the meek woman, but an austere and brave Umbrian, knowing no fear. Frederick II.'s soldiers, among whom were Saracen archers, made warlike excursions into Umbria. They attacked Spoleto and threatened Assisi, and upon one occasion

THE ALTAR-FRONT OF ST. CHIARA

Victoria and Albert Museum

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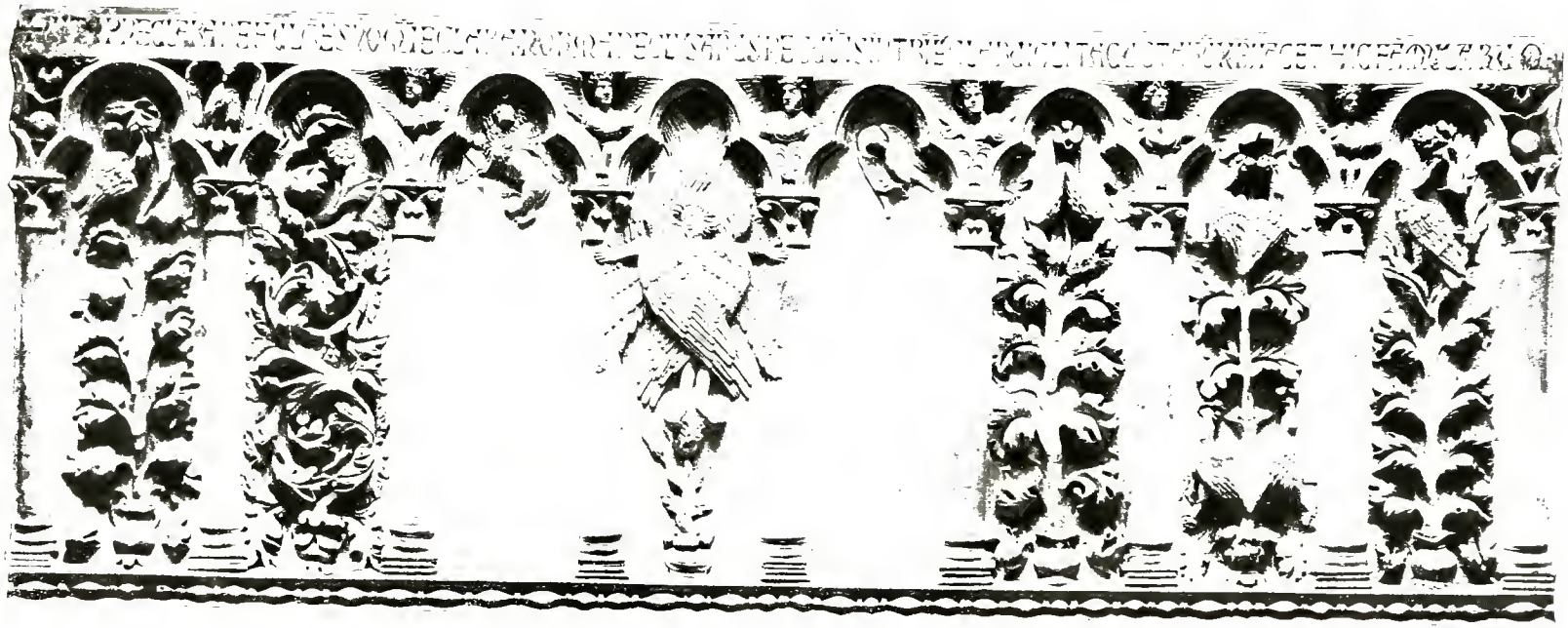

they surrounded San Damiano. Sta. Chiara lay ill. Her nuns called their mother to protect them. The sick mother, full of a brave heart, and the protectress of her daughters, sought out the ciborium, opened the door of her chamber, faced the courtyard filled with lustful Saracens, held up the Host before them, and they fell away.[1] It is said that a voice came to her ears from the ciborium saying, "I will be for ever thy guardian." "Vox quasi pueruli ad ejus aures insonuit—Ego vos semper custodiam." Sta. Chiara outlived Francis many years, and died in her sixtieth year, having received personal absolution from Pope Innocent IV. Her body lies in the crypt of the great church named after her, which stands upon the foundation of St. Giorgio, where Francis' body lay till 1230. Her portrait, some say by Cimabue, hangs in the same church in the south transept. San Damiano is now, in these far-off days from hers, almost as she left it. Enchanted with my first visit there in 1868, I have on two occasions, the summers of 1912, 1913, spent, perhaps in all, eight weeks in this "Luogo Sacro."

Having recalled to the memories of my readers a few leading points on the lives of St. Francis and Sta. Chiara, as I write I revive to myself the memories of so sweet a time, never to be forgotten. Inhaling the lovely air of the garden, trying to enter into the spirit of the place, and making many sketches in the convent and its gardens, or in companionship with the friars, time passed as swiftly as in a dream. Of those times I will now try to tell. For the right enjoyment of Italy in summer, which is, as I have already written, the proper time to visit this luxurious and gay country, early hours are essential. It is amazing to see the blinds of bed-chambers down drawn during these precious hours from 5 to 10 A.M. Breezes are

[1] The ciborium used by Sta. Chiara is among the treasures of San Damiano.

narrow paths. It is unlikely that a road of some importance, difficult and costly to make, would have been made at a time when it would have been unnecessary. But old or not the road is fascinating. It runs through a thick olive wood protected from the north-east by the noble Subasio mountain. On the west is the great Umbrian plain so exquisitely lit up by the afternoon sun. There are wandering walks to be enjoyed by a good pedestrian who does not mind losing his way between the road and the plain. Charming little farms will be met, neatly kept and full of promise for the painter or the student of agricultural and peasant life. And specially is this road enchanting in the early morning when the mountain, of an exquisite sapphire blue, forms a delicious setting to the olive fields, where in half shade in pale sunlight dove-coloured oxen plough slowly over the dry red earth exactly in the fashion of ancient days, the same plough being in use now as the one on Horace's farm 2000 years ago. No one yet has painted the olive. Many have tried. I have tried and failed, and will do so again many a time. And perhaps there is no place where that tree of trees for quaintness, variety, and unexpected shapes, is better presented in its strangeness and beauty, so different but always interesting as the light colours its leaves and fruit in the various hours of the day, than upon the slopes by the road leading to San Damiano. In the early morning when the sun has just risen over the high shoulder of Subasio, the tips of the olive leaves glitter like diamonds, so fair and glazed is their surface; the rest, those in shade in the mass, form a pale green haze in contrast with the pink-grey stems flashing here and there with burning notes of copper-coloured moss. The slightly red-tinted earth freshly turned up by the plough forms an enchanting contrast with pale rose-tinted rocks; among these, direct flashes of sunlight gleam out from soft violet shadows. White oxen

dragging the heavy plough through the resisting soil, driven by a peasant in a blue jacket, create silver points of light, to pass quickly to a grey which renders them, for a moment, indistinguishable, so bound up they seem to be in the whole colour scheme. All this delightful scene is framed on one side by the deep-blue mountain, on the other by the glittering plain. An element of life and joy ascends from the fields where the *contadini* are singing as they work songs which are brought up by the soft southern breeze, mixed with the hum of insects and the sharp notes of the *grillo*. Ere the road makes a sharp descent, so steep as to be impracticable for carriages, a solitary belfry hooded with tiles is seen mysteriously peeping through the shimmering olives. As a protective sentinel the tiny tower harbours three bells which call to prayer, and exorcise evil spirits of storm, thunder and lightning, bells which have been set ringing for many a century when the weather is ominous. Then there is, a little lower down, a long wall whereon is an inscription that a noble English lord has presented and endowed the Monastery of San Damiano for all time. Passing alongside the wall and face to face with the sunlit plain, the little piazza is reached, whence immediately and without hindrance is visible the whole length of the Umbrian plain from Foligno to Perugia. Here one rests a moment ; here were gathered the Saracen mercenaries of Frederick ; from here Chiara expelled them. Under a vaulted roof is a closed gate, but to be opened presently. Who pulls the cord and hears the tinkle of a cracked bell will be admitted, save it be a woman. What a blaze of colour greeted me upon that July morning ! Whitewashed walls and columbines, sunflowers, pinks, convolvuluses in full bloom. Light was playing games in this concentrated area of silence. The sun was making joy, reflecting it up into the white cornices from golden sunflowers,

while the deep strong blue of the sky played over their upper surfaces. It is the cloister shaded by arched roof supported by little truncated columns not a bit architectural, but very naïve and pleasant in shape. The centre, once the necropolis of the friars, is now a garden formed round an ancient stone well. Then came the human touch, two novitiates picking flowers to adorn the altar, another drawing water up to refresh the green and flowers before the coming of the heat of the day. I was a stranger to these youths who were to become my friends later. The Padre Superiore was called, and with great courtesy he told me that I might go where I liked either in the monastery or about the grounds. I do not know if it is generally known that San Damiano was purchased by the late Lord Ripon—hence the inscription upon the wall—to secure the sacred monastery and its land from the inroads of vandals or such people who take no heed of historical associations, and a government which might seek to apply the land to a "paying concern." Thus endowed, the monastery will remain secure from heedless commercialism. The tiny little church, to which we shall go presently, has received one addition during the last seven hundred years, the chapel in which the celebrated wooden crucifix is preserved. But for this addition the church is much as it was left by St. Francis after he had completed its repair. It is like a cave, and recalls immediately the anchorite's home and its seclusion. It is a symbol of concentration and abandonment of all joy save of spiritual imagination and communion with an unseen ideal, so fascinating to many and many a tortured soul in the earlier days of stern belief, of terror of eternal damnation, of war, of turmoil between classes, in an age of intense emotion, good and bad, which created poets, painters, and men of war, in the same breath, and when the weary sought peace in the groves of solitude.

The walls of the little church were painted by scholars of Giotto ; dim are the remains of the frescoes. Here, in this cave-like temple imagination may take flight from our restless period, and expand in an ancient atmosphere. It may people the sacred edifice with Francis and the old priest, with Chiara and her first followers, then a little later with Francis preaching to the little sisters. It can recall Francis seated in silent humility within a circle of ashes, throwing them over his head to degrade his body and raise his soul to highest purity. Then, having shown the sisters how unworthy he was, how he was but dust and ashes, we can picture him after the delivery of sweet encouragement leaving swiftly and taking the winding paths through the olive woods and forest to rejoin his companions at Portiuncula. Everything speaks of poverty ; yes, but not squalor, just clean pure poverty. The æsthetic sense is but slightly touched. One looks round in vain to discover any object of positive beauty, of rich ornament or exquisite shape in this little ancient church. The beauty which is there, however, is hidden from the eye ; it resides in mental association, and getting sight of it will depend upon a power to visualize, to call up the past till as a pageant it passes before the imaginative sense as a vision. It is dark ; the walls are almost black with candle- and oil-smoke of perchance near seven hundred years ; most of the day it is dark, but when in the later afternoon the sun streams through the little round window, the only one, and set in the south-west wall, a fantastic illumination is created—black seems to become copper-gold, shadows become purple, while the whole interior presents a mystery of divers tints like deep-toned precious stones. The little altar poorly furnished is a centre of brilliant radiance. Then, sitting there still and watching the rapid change from exultant glory of

the setting light, quickly followed by the violet shade of twilight, so sensitive became the imagination, so immersed in making a picture of the past, that the voices of the holy women would seem to be chanting the Ave Maria, and as the dusk took the place of twilight, voices seem to cease and a vision is vanishing as the phantom figures steal out into the sacristy: from thence passing to the *coro* to pray one last prayer, one of the women leaves the others and ascends a narrow circuitous stairway to an upper room. A tall grave delicate woman she is, and of a stately beauty, who passes through a minute chapel, and opens a door into a miniature *loggia* filled with pots of fresh pinks, which she feeds with water. Retiring to her chamber hard by, she shuts herself in to sleep little upon her bed of vine twigs and wooden pillow, and to pray much. It is Sta. Chiara, an offspring of a race of warriors. By now it is almost dark. The scene changes from past to present. It is no convent, but a monastery now; young men's voices travel from the cloisters, where I join them. A little company of them come with me to take their evening walk as I go back to Assisi, to return next day. One reflects well in the hour of growing darkness—imagination is favoured in twilight. Yes, there is a note of sadness in the little church, in the little sacristy where Chiara's first followers are all buried, and a remoteness almost suffocating clings about the *coro* of Chiara, where stands her lectern, where are the wooden benches, worm-eaten and black with age, on which the sisters sat seven hundred years ago. Nothing, absolutely nothing, speaks in the vernacular of to-day. If a visitor appears, a discordant note seems to be sounded in this grey tomb of a past age when all was so austere, so acutely restrained, and in a sense so seemingly unnatural; and yet the life of these strange mentally-wrought women was very beautiful, if it was also grim and exaggerated

THE CORO, SAN DAMIANO

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to the modern normal mind. One keeps respectful silence. One could only speak in whispers there somehow, for the air seems charged with a spiritual essence demanding reverence and silence. One can hardly believe in death here because, in the sense in which the saintly women regarded life, death has been swallowed up in victory. Voices of the dead, if not heard, seem to breathe in the air. In a way they are heard, so strong is the impression of deathlessness these little places (*luogi*) present. For surely there are wordless communications conveying strong impressions which the mind pictures so vividly that they are accepted by the senses and fall into them as if real sights and real sounds were engaged. Contrasts indicate the poetry of life as they aid the poetry of all nature. Out of the darkness of Francis' church, through a door from the ancient *coro*, we pass into a little cloister white and gay in appearance and, as I have said, full of brilliant sunflowers and sweet-scented pinks peeping from amidst pale purple daisies. A little enchanted and enchanting place where I painted much during many days, sometimes in the delightful company of Padre Leone, my friend the painter monk. Here, besides the lovely colour and the delight of painting, there came another source of enchantment—music—for the singing Friars were preparing for the great *festa* and inauguration of a statue to Sta. Chiara. The late Pope did great service to church music by forbidding the irreconcilable operatic sensuous strains which only a little time ago were fashionable during solemn periods of the mass. Now the fine Gregorian tones are in use, Palestrina sings again, and the severe restrained church music of the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries is once more heard. It belongs to the associations and is in perfect keeping with this old conventicle. As I painted, the voices of singers chanting periods in the mass, mingling delightfully among the columns of

the cloister, stole among the flowers, travelled gravely, echoing hither and thither, and sometimes I too had to join in the song while I painted. There is no discontent, no sign of desolation, no evidence of idleness or lassitude in the lives of the serious men who have chosen a life of discipline. Though every hour of the day is accounted for, for prayer, meditation, work intellectual or physical, this is no place of slavery; each portion of the day falls in order without apparent pressure, and symmetrically even from the first hour of daylight to the last. There is plenty of time for all that has to be done. The painter can use his leisure for painting as he wishes, the poet his for verse, the historian his for study, the musician his to compose, and the preacher to write his homilies, for the Franciscans are great preachers still. Or the entirely religious will occupy himself in his fashion. There is freedom in the order, but a freedom which never degenerates to licence, or admits of one of the great scourges of artificial life and too much liberty, boredom! Living with, and coming into daily contact with, the Franciscan community, one is solaced and grows calm. An equable life with no outside distraction is productive of fruition as well as rapture. Hilarity I have never seen, gaiety of manner, yes. Most noticeable is a certain equability and moderation which, if not stimulating in a progressive sense, is extremely delectable and conservative, and the quality of moderation leads to a very captivating if grave courtesy of manner. Absence from the harass and pester almost inseparable from a life in touch with a multitude of conflicting elements, as well as from inharmonious passages of events which bear little or no relation to the real life, certainly does bring its reward in a self-reliant temperament, not of necessity exclusive, but vigorously concentrated. The range of action stimulated by the monastic life may not be extensive, but the range of thought may be indefinitely

THE GARDEN, SAN DAMIANO

(By permission of Mrs. A. M. Dykes)

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extended. In the monastery have been preserved the seeds of civilization, of science, art, and history. The popular idea is not correct which attributes to the monastic system encouragement to sloth or to idleness. The fact is otherwise. The object and direction of labour in the secluded life is different to the material aim of the swift-going world outside, for there is little inconsequent emulation and less personal ambition, but there is harmony, and growingly so now, because the Franciscans are intellectually superior to the forerunners of my early memory. A far superior class now joins the order—young men who have known life, who have served in the army, in trades and in professions, which they do not leave to avoid labour, but to perfect themselves, as they believe, in peace rather than dissipate themselves in turmoil; hence when they take the vow they know what they are leaving and to what life they are going. My friend, the accomplished and refined Padre Leone, was educated in the world. The pupil of a distinguished painter, he has gone through the best school training that Italy can provide. Now he has his studio close by the ancient dormitory. The *loggia* out of it overlooks the plain, an ideal place for an artist. The Padre, young and full of energy, is an admirable antiquarian, a close student of the history of art, and a painter of poetic vision. We painted much together, as well as making tours to various towns in the vicinity of Assisi, and I found much to learn from his knowledge of Umbrian art. Here then in a building more than seven hundred years old a modern life can be, and is being, led in an ancient atmosphere and in peace. In the outside world, with the swift changes which must ever happen while ambition and wealth take the first places in it, our less noble ideals expand, the higher are apt to shrink. Peace and quiet progress, a refined and cultured life, are

maintained within the few acres of this veritable Garden of Eden. Beautifully cared for, the vines are prolific, fruit-trees abound, there is an ample supply of water to irrigate the whole garden planted upon terraces, and I wonder if my readers will believe me, when I say that practically all the work of the vineyards and garden is done by *one man*, but that one man takes pride in his work, which he loves, for is he not "Un Artista"? His hours are as long as daylight lasts. He knows his art and he loves to do it well; but then there is no eight hours' bill tyranny in the monastery. The peaceful atmosphere is beyond the reach of trade unions, and out of the way of the indifferent working-man so common now in many parts of England. It is indeed a matter for deep gratitude that modern improvements and labour-saving do not come into the curriculum. Old implements which served well in the past are not thrown aside for modern complicated machinery. Modern ugliness has not yet invaded the garden or other ancient parts of the monastery. The refectory is as it was seven hundred years ago. I question if one single bench or table has been added, though where worms have eaten through thick planks of oak and walnut, rough new bits have been inserted. So one of the most picturesque buildings in Italy is as it was when Chiara received Pope Innocent III. and the strange occurrence of the multiplication of loaves then took place. Many were the hours I sat in that circumjacence conjuring up the past. Scenes which passed before my mental vision I may perhaps offer to that part of a world which has not yet lost veneration for a great past, has not yet assumed the devil's garb of Futurism, an ugly habit indeed and in accord with all that is most vain, most aggressive, most foolish in a time of unrest.[1] Immediately out of the

[1] It is not conceivable that the cultured countries of Europe can ever now side with

THE REFECTORY OF SAN DAMIANO

Thirteenth Century

(*By permission of Mrs. A. M. Dykes*)

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door of the refectory one can either pass into the cloister or turn into a courtyard, flanked by the walls of the monastery, where the brothers wash their habits in a huge tank. Opening out of the court is the granary where huge vats for wine are stored, where all kinds of carpentry progress—a place full of delightful litter and peopled with swallows that fly in and out, to and from their nests in the eaves. It is not an ancient building, but it shows all the old traditions of fourteenth-century construction, a vaulted roof, thick walls, a small window, and red tiled floor. Just outside of this granary is the fish-pond, not fish for eating, but of gold and silver, the playmates of the younger novitiates and friars. It is bordered with vines, it is sentinelled by cypress, it is sheltered by fruit-trees, and from the path surrounding it the plain of Umbria lies fair and golden or blue from Spoleto to Perugia. There is no more lovely situation than this garden commands to be found in all Umbria. A painter might spend months working in an area of not more than the square of four hundred yards and yet not exhaust the variety and charm provided by every turn and in every direction. The greater part of two summers I spent every day in San Damiano, and as with the men who go to the North or South Pole, the place has such a fascination for me that I must return, for much I left undone that ought to be recorded. There is no grander line in the world that I know of than that great hump of Subasio makes. The mountain looks like some protecting giant over the little place of peace ; not exactly beautiful, it is grim and strong and in harmony by contrast with the brooding luxury of stillness unbroken save for the plaintive songs of the *contadini*, whose voices reverberate against the slopes of the willing hill, to be brought by

Kultur, the German mask to conceal the tiger's eye and the appetite for unspeakable crime !

light airs down into the garden of Eden, where no serpent has as yet made havoc, where the demon of commercialism dare not enter, and where are united pagan poetry and Christian gravity. For the little ilex wood deep in shadow might shelter Pan while the descendants of Francis but a few yards away say their mass. Here where Giotto or his followers painted their serious and emotional frescoes, the modern painter can tell the story of his visions in a vernacular different, but perhaps equally sincere, and where for those who will see it, lies a beauty such as no painter has yet entirely entrapped, enhanced by association and alive with deeply moving human emotions. Hereabouts there is no sluggard life. Every one is busy—no, that is a wrong word,—occupied, interested, from the girl who sings as she works, to the monk who studies in his cell, not in herds as if weary of their own selves, so typical of the jaded life in cities. The monotonous social machine has no grinding power of execution here! There are no noises, but there are delightful sounds, no detestable machinery groaning, shrieking, and making life hideous with all that it produces in its train. It is true one can hear the whistle of the engine drawing the train along the plain, and one can see the thin line of steam or smoke, reminding us of so much that is forbidding in modern life. Men are at peaceful and delightful work in their cells within those concentrating walls. Narrow in area only are the monastery cells, for how far beyond them can the mind travel; surely beyond space into a region of Idea. Much has been achieved in the cell that has moved the world afterwards and created intellectual growth, saved learning and tradition from destruction, during periods of peevish or irrational excitement—and in such little cells as these. Who shall say if the modern movement, made up of advertisement and superficiality, may not drive serious men again to the monastery, to the willingly

THE BARN, SAN DAMIANO

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accepted Carceri, where away from unrest they may construct, invent, and use the noblest in them for some other purposes than getting rich or providing fresh means for swift locomotion, or still worse, the use of a creative faculty to conceive and construct implements for destruction, the Prussian ideal! Perhaps poverty of purse and wealth of soul, not squalor (there is much of that in the modern city), may find a throne again, and perhaps a modern voice may sing, as the poor Francis sang, another Hymn to the Sun, and another Fra Angelico make visions of Heaven. Such poetry as they made will not be born in the vehement self-assertion of the factory or city; it could not be. Great things that are lasting can only arrive from seclusion and reserve. Assisi is a place of quiet. In a sense it is a kind of monastery, so detached it still is, and in this matter Assisi is behind the world, thank the powers! It is not a rich but a poor town, hence vulgarity is almost absent; when it does appear it has been brought from England or America by Italians who have enlisted the wrong things and brought them to their old town, where they do not find a natural or congenial home. Vulgarity is not in its home in Assisi. It is curious, considering the inflow of foreigners, that Assisi does retain so much of the charm of the Middle Ages, but so it is. So that between monastic peace and the peace to be found in the town there is no strong line of demarcation, and there is no strain between the town and the Church as there once was. Sensible folk have settled down under the new circumstances of Italian unity; one hears no more grumble among the clerics that the Holy Father has been robbed of his estate. Indeed were it possible to poll opinion, even among strong churchmen it would probably result in a minority for the return of temporal power which is recognized by the younger generation to be a thing of the past and never to be revived. This greater harmony and

certainty produces a sober-minded touch between laymen and clerics, who do not glare at one another as they did before the union; now they meet upon common grounds of interest and meet without animosity. Festivals have not lost their power over the people's thoughts. Reverence for the memory of St. Francis and Sta. Chiara is as deep in the townspeople and the countryfolk as formerly. Unity has not upset religion; it has set it in a salutary direction. A few pages back I told how the friars practised their singing and music in view of the festival of Sta. Chiara. We will presently go to the festival. It seems strange that no statue had been erected hitherto to the person of the great Abbess at San Damiano. There is one in San Rufino, a church which is not identified with her to anything like the same degree as her convent and its church. However, now in the little piazza there does stand a bronze statue of her; its merits I prefer not to discuss. It came from a studio in Rome in a long box, which was opened in my presence. Then came the building up of the pedestal, which I do not like, then its erection in the piazza, then the festival of dedication. There was a good deal of criticism in the air, objection to the change made in the piazza, for the Assisi folk, though democratic now as they have always been, are conservative, and rightly so when their ancient monuments are meddled with by unsympathetic authorities. However, upon this occasion I do not think there was much reason for adverse criticism. For whatever may be said of the statue, the piazza and the approach to it, although altered somewhat, have been improved, nothing having been removed that was of any moment. The day of the festival arrived, and Assisi was *en fête*. Two cardinals arrived at the monastery from Rome. There had been a great clean-up and whitewashing of passages and cells, and fresh flowers were cut for the altar. But the poetry of the presence of

ANCIENT STAIRWAY, SAN DAMIANO

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poverty was unmolested. No choice metals replaced the old wooden candlesticks on the altar. Just the same old wooden ones, rather out of the perpendicular, remained to do service they had performed for many a decade, with but little of their original gilt left on them. A new altar-cloth has been woven, but of the cheapest kind. The little harmonium standing in the ancient choir had been tuned. I hate harmoniums. I wish some rich man would give a little organ to San Damiano. The friars had practised their Gregorian Mass, vestments had been cleaned, there remained but one thing now to come, Pontifical High Mass with all the ritual of St. Peter's at Rome, to be sung in the dark chapel of the "Little Sisters of the Poor." And it was a wonderful sight, a touching note of poetry. All the paraphernalia of the Roman Church shone out in august splendour and outward glory against the time-darkened walls which Francis had restored. Wealth and poverty, splendour and simplicity, ceremony and self-abnegation, temporal and spiritual power, met under the roof where Francis had knelt in ashes, where he had preached self-abasement; and where his body lay after his death in front of a grille, which has disappeared, opening into Chiara's nunnery out of the apse of the older portion of the building, upon the ceiling of which is an ancient fresco of uncertain date. This faded fresco presents a stately Madonna and Child of early thirteenth-century design. It silently emphasizes a faith unchanged, it is there to us as a symbol of that greatest love, a woman's to her child. It was time to start for early mass. I wished, as other of my Italian friends did, to be present at both the low and the high mass. I wanted to feel the likeness in the difference. Together with them I left at a very early hour. When Italians are out on days of *festa*, they are in their most happy and natural mood. Never a riotous crowd or noisy, there is always a certain gay dignity

in the demeanour of this people of an aristocratic blood. I like to watch events on such days, and particularly I enjoyed those of this day. The townspeople came down from Assisi in groups of merry holiday-makers. The *contadini* came up from the country by the by-ways through the olive groves, and from the farms in the vicinity, and they came in considerable numbers. It was a Sunday morning. Pontifical mass was to be sung at 10, an hour not too late to enjoy the cooler hours of an August morning. Nature was in a festive mood too: mountains clear as crystal; the sky of that strange china-blue only, as far as I know, seen in Umbria; a few heat-clouds, slowly moving and clear-cut against the blue vault of heaven, cast violet shadows, coming and going, over the hills and plains. The Gran turco is just cut; its remaining stalks spring out of the red earth like pale tongues of flame. Purple and golden grapes hang heavily, as yet not ripe or fully coloured, for there is no sign that the autumn has begun and the *Vendemmia* is near, that festival so dear to Dionysus, a link between the old and the new world, the pagan and the Christian. All the people, townsfolk and country, are ready to receive joy as it comes along the sweet mountain air, to partake of nature's solace in the most divine summer climate in the world. They are a part of the beautiful landscape, the people, as they come down the white dusty road. Passing from sunlight to shade, groups of them in fair coloured raiment are mysteriously lost and found. Girls form themselves into groups often hand in hand. The young men straggle more, but invariably do not mix with the young women. The sexes keep separate. I suppose this is a survival of an ancient custom. Nor do the old and the young mix much, though not far off there may be "a duenna" in watch to snap at any lapse of convention. Every one is bent upon quiet enjoyment.

EARLY MORNING, GARDEN OF SAN DAMIANO

(*By permission of Miss Robinson*)

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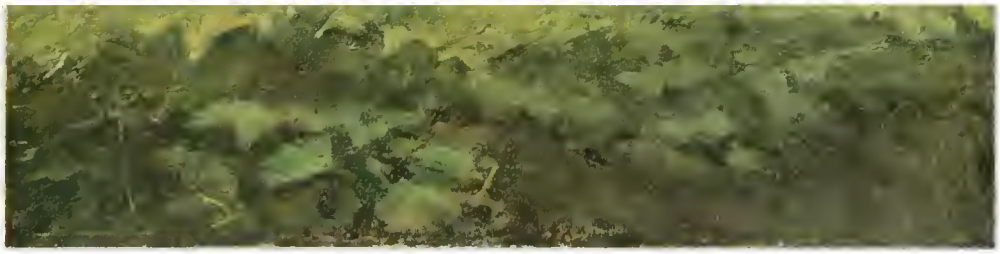

Nature has put on her best, life is perfect, one is in the company of the gods. Pan is there. What does it matter if it be a pagan or Christian festival to which the little crowds are moving? It is probably in reality both. Anyhow nature responds, denominations vanish, and *all* nature praises God. Upon such an occasion one realizes what St. Francis' Canticle to the Sun means, and how near he was, as we are here, to the Great God of Light we miss so much in the north. Presently there is a large crowd in the little piazza, mostly composed of *contadini* from the outlying farms, some from distant towns (some have been walking all through the night to come to the festival), all are in gay attire, but they are *very silent*, for mass has begun, and the little black church is crammed with people. The outside folk have faith, for passages reached in the ritual are told to them by the silver tones of the little bell which announces to those in and out of the church the various points arrived at in the sacred service. The saint commemorated to-day is not dead to them, she lives and hears them, pities and consoles them, she is "Nostra Chiara," as we shall presently see. The door into the church is closed. I got in by the private entrance before the commencement of mass, thanks to my friends in the monastery. Two Cardinals, an Archbishop, and a Bishop, with their attendants, pace up and down the narrow whitewashed passages outside the cells, a picturesque scheme of black and white. High mass begins. To see the impressive sight as well as possible I take up my station under the west window and stand there in the dark. No sun illumines the church, which is in semi-darkness. Presently candles are lit upon the altar, and in mystery of half-light there appears a glitter of jewels and sparkling of gold. Presently the cause of that glitter and sparkle is evident. The celebrant is the Archbishop. It is his heavily-jewelled mitre which glitters, and the gold and elaborate brocades of chasuble and cope which

sparkle. The Cardinal is enthroned. He also wears a jewelled mitre and magnificent crimson cope embroidered in gold. Gregorian tunes sung in unison enchant the ear with their strange intervals, so entirely in keeping with the mystery of which the celebration is a symbol. The singers are not visible to the worshippers. They (all friars) stand behind the altar in the ancient *coro*, grouped about a huge book clamped with iron, from which they read their plain-song. Overlooking them is the beautiful Madonna upon the vaulted ceiling of the little apse. Each in his sedilium, the friars who repeat responses are ranged over against that part of the wall where was the grille against which lay the body of Francis, brought hither in the night, guarded by soldiers, from the *Luogo*, Portiuncula. The congregation at this patrician ceremony of Pontifical Mass is composed mostly of poor people, anyhow people who in rich England would be called poor. Poor they really are not. They have the sun which ripens their fruits, a fertile soil in which to grow them, few needs, and frugal habits. One of the many forces the Church of Rome commands is the extensive field of emotion covered by its beliefs and ritual. Simultaneously with the praise of poverty is the exaltation of the princely power of the Church. Rags and jewels are of equal value. To celebrate the festival of Sta. Chiara, whose ideal was poverty, representatives of Vatican and Kingly Church appear in their most costly priestly vestments, in the very church where St. Francis worshipped after he had stripped himself of all his possessions and wore only rags of a coat already discarded by a poor gardener. Francis was poorer than the poorest gardener. The goddess whose worship was daily and hourly the rule of the fraternity and sisterhood was Poverty, Francis' Bride and Chiara's Sister. Centuries after the foundation of the Order and in the place of its first initiation, within

its very walls, a few steps only from the niche in which the young Francis hid himself from his angry father upon the eve of his acceptation of absolute poverty, the wealth and ceremonial of the Church is authenticated by jewelled mitres, embroidered copes, and an elaborate ritual entirely appropriate in the great temple in pagan Christian Rome, St. Peter's. With all the contradiction, with all the inconsistency of the situation it is impossible to deny the extreme impressiveness of the scene and the varieties of emotion, in a sense contradictory, to which the ceremony gave rise. It is by contrast that the quality of each extreme is accentuated, and the enormous power of the Church of Rome is verified. It is to be questioned if to the poor people the pompous and impressive scene enacted before them brought closer to their unsophisticated sagacity the mysteries of the altar, and the presence of Christ, of Mary, of Francis, and Chiara. They came to the festival as an ancient crowd would have gone to a Temple of Jupiter or Temple of Vesta. Perhaps the poor gathered together here were nearer the ideals of Sta. Chiara and Francis than the dignified prelates who represent the power, authority, and wealth of the Church. Perhaps a sisterly and brotherly touch came to the humble folk from the souls of the brother and sister of poverty who, having practised poverty, knew all about it. Perhaps they are nearer to the primitive church, which must have been poor, than to the artificial growth which superseded it, materialized it, and gave to the new religion a pomp and circumstance inherited from Imperial Rome. The true imitators of Christ are still with the unsophisticated *contadini.* Centuries of political changes and education have not weakened a bond that has grown into a custom—the real presence of their saints with them always. Their saints are guardians of the modern people of Assisi ; and it is the living atmosphere of the past still pervading the present which to the thoughtful

mind seems to accentuate its reality. Whatever made the first appeal was so strong, so potential, so human in all its elements, that, materialize it as much as may be, observe it with elaborate ornament and doctrine, the poor cling to the original directness of intention. The great Roman hierarchy is aware of the power over the people that Francis and Chiara still command, hence they send the visible signs of the power of the Church—the gorgeous apparel of their priests, the dignity of the Cardinal and Archbishop, to say mass in the Temple of Poverty. It is, I think, in this direction that is embodied the combination of poetry and worldly wisdom so marked and so striking in the scene that I try to express in words and convey some impression of. There were other details of interest to come later in the day, when the piazza was again crowded with people to take part in the unveiling of the statue and to hear an oration. I was courteously invited to take a place upon the raised platform among the dignitaries of the Church, the Mayor of Assisi, and the orator. I preferred to mix with the crowd, to hear their remarks, and learn what impression the events passing before them were making upon critical and intelligent Italian minds. Be it remembered that the statue stands within a few feet of the door or window wherein Chiara stood holding up the ciborium, at which sight the Saracens were struck with terror and fled. The statue represents her in that act. I noticed that a *contadina* was examining (and evidently very critically) the just-unveiled statue. I asked her what she thought of it. "Nothing!" was her laconic reply. "It is a species, a kind of pretty Venus. It is not *our* Chiara — non è la nostra Chiara." Then with some vehemence she continued, "Do you think, Signorino, that the little bronze woman who stands there would have struck terror in the hearts of cruel soldiers? No, never!" This is a

striking instance of an intuitive insight, untutored critical good sense that these simple folk inherit and affirm. They think they know because they conceive by instinct, observe without affectation, and believe in the real presence of their saints, not as dead enigmas, but as continuous and assured infallibility. This tale reminds me of another somewhat of the same essence. One day, being in the church of San Pancrazio in Rome, I noticed an old woman doing a very good trade in selling candles. We got to talk. "How did it come that you are here selling candles?" "Ah, mio Signore, I am a very poor woman, and I prayed to Jesus, to Mary, to Peter, and Paul, but it was no use, and how could it be, for these great people surely are too much occupied to listen to or help the poor old woman that I was? And one day I met a friend, who asked, 'Have you tried all the saints in the calendar?' 'No,' I replied. 'Then,' said my friend, 'try San Pancrazio; I know he is not busy and has few calls for help.' Signorino mio, I prayed at the altar in the church of San Pancrazio, and my prayers were heard. 'Take your place in my church, sit you down and sell candles, and I will be with you.' So spoke San Pancrazio to my heart, and I obeyed. Now, Signorino mio, I do well, make a good trade, and, all thanks to my saint, I am no longer poor." So the old woman was justified in applying to a saint of no great repute. This anecdote, not invented, but actually experienced, goes far to tell the living force, still active, of a personal attachment believed in by humbler folk between the spiritual and material worlds. In this kind of atmosphere of Faith, the scene before me became very real. By real I mean more than reminiscent, because I knew what was passing through the mind of the crowd, anyhow that part of it which mattered, not the visitors or the "advanced" townspeople, but the *contadini*, who are still spiritual, even if they are simple, even "material" in some of their "natural" ways of

living. So I was in the right mood to appreciate the eulogium upon Sta. Chiara which was to follow. The orator set forth the life of Sta. Chiara in elegant and forcible Tuscan. Being a Sicilian, his manner was histrionic, his acting superb, and as he passed from scene to scene of the life of Chiara, so vivid were his words, so impressive his delivery, that absolute silence was imposed upon a crowd of hearers numbering certainly not less than four hundred people, and mostly peasants. His words went straight to their hearts. No vulgar applause marred the solemnity of the occasion, all that was to be heard was murmured by "*Si, Si, Si,*" so expressive of conclusive acquiescence. The oration occupied at least an hour, then came the unveiling of the monument, which was received in silence. Ave Maria was then sung by the whole company, followed by the benediction. Reluctantly the crowd broke up, some of the people returning to Assisi, but most of them going back to their farms in the plain. And so ended the doings of a very remarkable day, which had given rise to many interesting thoughts and speculation, which had brought me closely into touch with many sides of the Italian character, its religion, faith, and intelligence. And people talked about the *festa* for many a day. Next morning I went back to my work at San Damiano. The dignitaries had returned to Rome, and the accustomed work in the monastery was proceeding as if nothing of importance had happened the day before. A day or two after, I started to find my way across the fields, as we should say, and it is difficult, to Sta. Maria degli Angeli, but in reality by narrow circuitous and rough paths trodden only by peasants' feet, and no doubt the route taken by St. Francis to get from San Damiano to Portiuncula. Few people other than natives know this way or can find it. It is a highly entertaining walk. The pretty retreats of the peasantry are come upon suddenly, so closed in are they by luxurious growth of every kind. At the

time of year of which I am writing, early in August, the Gran turco is but just cut, gourds, melons, cucumbers are in full flower, while fruit almost litters the ground with a wealth of colour never seen in England. The purple fig is ripe, grapes are colouring, and the leaves still retain that golden green, the special property of the vine. Life is busy in the homestead, a second crop of hay is being stacked, beans are being threshed, corn is being laid by, and the pods of Indian maize, or as the Italians call it, Gran turco, are laid out upon the threshing-floor, or hung up in *loggie*, or dispersed to lie wherever the ground is dry and the sun can ripen the corn pods. Of children there are plenty. Of animals, the big draught Umbrian oxen, a mule, and a donkey are for daily use, while the pets invariably are a yearling pig and lamb. These are fantastically named Francesco, Pietro, Benedetto, Alfredo. So tame are they, they come at call, the pig and the lamb being bosom friends of children, who mourn them at a certain season when their happy existence is concluded. "When that time comes," said a little girl to me, "when Alfredo has to die, I go away and weep all night and day." So passing in and out among this pastoral life, it has been my habit to reach Sta. Maria degli Angeli without touching the highroad till it became necessary to do so. No doubt I took the ancient way entirely in use before a carriage-road had been made from the plain up to Assisi. Where the small town of Sta. Maria degli Angeli now stands a thick forest grew. In it was the *Luogo* which was received by Francis as a gift from the Camaldolites. This *Luogo*, or "Place" was called by the friars "Portiuncula," which, literally translated, means the "little portion." The ancient chapel and the house in which Francis died are now within the unsympathetic church designed by Vignola in a dull period of sham classic. In old times there was a lake

hard by, whence Francis procured fish, which he sent up every year in a basket as a payment in kind to his benefactors the Camaldolites. The original friars who composed the circle at Portiuncula were Bernard, Angelo, Silvestro, and perhaps also Rufino, Masseo, Juniper, and Leo. The story of St. Joseph of Arimathæa's first coming to Glastonbury is not unlike the story of Francis' first experiences in Umbria. In both cases the land was granted. Joseph and his companions erected a chapel out of wattle smeared with mud. Presently it was cased in metal, then there rose up on its site the chapel of St. Joseph, of Saxon work, to be added to by the Normans afterwards; later, and near at hand, grew up the great church of Glastonbury which became intimately connected with early English history. St. Francis found a ruined chapel, erected huts of straw strengthened with mud, over which presently a little stone house was built, both to be enshrined in the huge but, to me, ugly church designed in the seventeenth century. It is in this way that we must think of Portiuncula if we are to visualize it as it was in early days. A tiny church, and a hut of rushes or straw, enclosed by a deep hedge of roses in the centre of a wood, made their temporary home. I am told by architects that Vignola's church is fine architecture, that its measurements are correct, that it is a grand Palladian structure. I dare say that is quite true. It may be a great work in the Palladian manner; it may be mathematically correct in every detail; to me it is a cold uninspired work, and the only service it performs which is of any use to me is that it safely encloses the little chapel which has no pretension to architect's architecture, but which is beautiful, not only through association, but in itself, for it is obviously a bit of sincere mediæval structure. A semicircular apse, a gable roof, an arched door, and that is about all; and still it is beautiful.

The house is of far less certain origin than the church; it is not so ancient. It may be that the original hut became a building even in the time of St. Francis, but there is, as far as I know, no proof of that. If it was erected in the time of the first friars, probably they built it, and that may be so because we have seen that Francis was a *muratore*; it may be likely that the fascinating art of construction clung to him who was through and through an artist. One likes to think it was so. One likes to think that we see it as Francis' almost blind eyes saw it in his last moments, when, worn out with physical suffering and a very old man at forty-two, he lay there dying. The saint who had neglected his body, "Brother Ass," as he called it, who had eaten ashes mixed with wretched begged food to make it even less palatable, but who in his last hours was consoled by "Brother Jacoba," a noble Roman lady who brought to him a confection which the Romans call *mostacciuolo*, a concoction of almonds, sugar, and honey, which the poor sufferer enjoyed—a touch of nature which draws one very close to the good man who had ever sought to conquer the body that his soul might live in an ideal which no man so nearly reached as Francis. This time he "made a sacrament to his body," and confessed that he had ill-treated "Brother Ass." In which saying there is that touch of humorous fancy that marks so many of the cheerful Francis' sayings. One would like to think that the walls we see hold the echo of Francis' last singing upon that October evening, "Voce mea ad Dominum clamavi." Perhaps they do! If they do not, the universe, a bigger place than the little cell, does echo the saintly poet's voice even now. The poor scarred temples, the sightless eyes, as he lay there dead, bore witness to the terrible suffering that the good man had gone through, ever cheerful, even joyous amid physical agony. The sacred wounds he sought to hide were now made visible. La

Vernia has seen the victory, the triumph of spirit over matter. Miracle or no miracle, the marks of the passion were engraven upon his hands and feet and on his side. None of the historians dispute that. Perhaps upon the self-same space of ground upon which we stand while we mentally review the closing scene, and think of the progress from the gay boy's life, not much more than twenty years before his death, up to such a supreme climax; perhaps upon a little space before us the body of the greatest saint of all Christendom lay. And who, however prone to doubt the supernatural or not to entertain a miracle, can stand there on that spot without reverent reflection or perhaps profound emotion? I have seen people kneeling there in tears, prostrating themselves and kissing the ground with vehement fervour. And who can wonder? Even the coldest of us, the utterest Puritan or most dismal sceptic, must be somehow moved, somehow stirred, bearing in memory what Francis overcame, what he conquered in a nature the extreme of sensitive—the artist pleasure-loving temperament which shrinks from disease and hates all that goes along with a loathsome sickness. Have we not lately passed by the *Luogo* of the Leper Hospital, where the brilliantly clad young man of fastidious tastes, delighting in the scents of flowers, and in all those æsthetic joys which are so much to a poet, especially in those days of intensity of feeling, tended the stricken folk whom no one would approach, kissing their sores that he might share their suffering, and take some of it to himself? What Divine pity it was! what a conquest of self! It was an irresistible appeal to love that Francis made, an appeal that centuries have not weakened but quickened.[1] Surely every place or scene of

[1] An appeal in harmony with Europe's indignation against the false philosophy of might is right, love is weakness, which has poisoned the soul of Germany and killed its influence for good for ever.

his transcending ministration to the altar of love acquires more and not less reverence as the human race better comprehends suffering. Upon the day of the *Perdono* there come hither pilgrims from all parts of Europe. This is the one occasion when Vignola's church assumes a kind of dignity; it is the sleeping-place, the inspiring-place of thousands of pilgrims. We may call it superstition that brings them—it may be "a reverent fear, such superstition reigns among the rude." It is a feeling burnt into the very marrow of a people at once constitutionally emotional, who have retained primitive instincts and are saturated with unreasoning faith. Some have come by train from great distances, but comparatively a few only of the great crowds which for two days seem to populate the commune of Assisi. The greater number have walked. During the interval between the festivals of the *Perdono*, poor peasants will save their pence to pay for the journey and to keep them while they make it on foot. I have seen them at early dawn lying sleeping in the streets, in the Piazza of Sta. Maria, upon the roadsides, and in the fields by thousands. The huge doors of the church are open. Upon the occasion of the *Perdono* there is formed a long passage, which is railed off from the main body of the church, up the great nave to the door of the chapel of the Portiuncula, that stands under the great dome. Few pilgrims walk the distance which divides the door of the church from the entrance to the chapel. They proceed shuffling along upon their knees. Some crawl upon their hands and knees with bowed heads. They are in earnest — of that there can be no doubt. Their countenances are in rapture and absolutely concentrated upon the object which has brought them hither, to receive free pardon. Each penitent takes turn to pray before the altar of Francis' little church and to kiss the floor of the sacred hut. The whole of the east end of the

huge church is peopled—some are sleeping, some murmur together, some are munching hard bits of bread carried in their pockets from afar. There are almost as many men as women, but only a few children appear to take part in this moving spectacle. Of course opinions must differ, and these pages are no place for contentious criticism. Differently constituted minds will view the strange scene according to their prejudice, preconception, or instinct. I have heard it said by northerners that the spectacle is revolting. It may be so to some kinds of temperament. But to others it appears as a substantial expression of faith in something over which death has no power, a continuation of intercessions which gives the scene a vivid vitality, and an undisguised survival of mediæval intensity. Calling intensity by any name we please, it is a living force even in this critical age! Those folk whom the enlightened materialist may pity, are happy in a faith which carries with it absolute consolations, which gives to the very poorest hope of kingship, being a prop in time of weakness, a balm in time of sorrow, kindling hope when despair is near to conquering, and perhaps if they could tell us, if we really knew them, those humble folk who bend the knee to "superstition" are happier than such of us as live in palaces satisfied with material aids, being, perhaps, even jaded by them. Perhaps they are seeing more real light illuminating their palaces of poverty, and with greater intensity, than makes its way into the gloomy abodes of enlightened cynicism. Upon one occasion I took two young American ladies, not troubled by sentiment, down to see the *Perdono*. They were amazed at the scene. Looking on silently, and obviously moved, one of them turned to me and said, "It is very wonderful. I suppose this means the power of faith; we don't understand that in America,—perhaps some day we shall." I do not believe

THE ANCIENT CHURCH OF ST. MARIA DEGLI ANGELI AS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

(By permission of Sir Charles Seeley, Bart.)

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that the fervour of Italian mediæval art can be really comprehended, entirely realized, unless the temperament which created it has been informed by personal contact; because, to get at the art of a people, we must entertain their beliefs, even if we do not accept those, which, carried to the extreme of emotion, are what the cynic calls superstitions. The pictures of St. Francis' miracles upon the walls of the great church are far better comprehended after being in near touch with exactly the same inspiring causes that urged Cimabue, Giotto, and their contemporaries, who believed in what they painted. Vignola's church is symbolical of a self-conscious, mathematical pretence of Renaissance. The little chapel within it symbolizes an intensity carried down by tradition from the very foundations of human feeling. It symbolizes love, it bears no relation to science or to mathematics. It is an affair of the heart, of an intense emotion put into stone, and all we have seen going on round about it corresponds and fits in with it quite perfectly, as if time were nothing in relation to the antiquity of love presented by faith and crowned by sacrifice. The scene we have witnessed will not bear analysis; it is above analysis; it speaks without words; it is to be felt, not reasoned about; and hence there is peculiar and remote charm, even if it be mixed with regret that so much that was simple and direct has been pushed aside in the course of the development of rationalism. As evening comes on I walk on the road to Spello, a mile or so, to Rivo Torto (crooked stream), passing a factory which ought never to have been permitted there, a squalid brick building with a huge shaft from which smoke at times pours forth in a manner as disgraceful to science and authority as in England, where one expects, if one laments, ugliness—but in Italy! "Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa." It is a pretty road, proceeding along the plain and bordered by fruit-gardens. When Francis and his companions

moved to Rivo Torto from Portiuncula they went through a forest all the way. It is now a damp part of the plain. In the thirteenth century no doubt it was often flooded. However, it was habitable, because the Crucigers owned some tumble-down half buildings, half sheds in which they lived, and these they transferred to the Franciscans. We pass on the way two chapels of great antiquity, San Rufino d'Arce and Sta. Maria Maddalena, which belonged to the Order, but not to the time of Francis. These appear before the large Franciscan church is reached. It is an ugly church as it stands now; the original was burnt down. But we have not come here to see that, but the caves round which the church was erected, where the brothers lived. Of this place and its seclusion Francis was very fond ; he never liked to live in a house, or even a hut ; he preferred a cave. It is probable that the brothers occupied the sheds or huts, and Francis retired to the cave to be alone. It was in the self-created solitude of Rivo Torto that Francis wrote the first rules for the Order, the *Forma vitae*. It was from here that he went to Rome to visit Bishop Guido of Assisi, who procured for him an audience with Innocent III., from whom, after some delay, he obtained permission to establish his Order. It was at Rivo Torto that Francis concentrated his capacity for organization in a period of his teaching when he was becoming famous, when he was disliked and suspected, as well as loved and respected. No traveller interested in the Franciscan movement should fail to make a visit to Rivo Torto. It was at Rivo Torto that the brothers experienced some of their most severe hardships, and there that the event happened so charmingly told in the *Speculum Salvationis*. "I am dying," cried out one of the brothers from his sleeping-place. Francis heard the words, and said to the others, "Let us rise." Lighting a lamp, Francis asked who cried, "I am dying." "It was I," was the reply; "I am dying of hunger."

Then immediately Francis spread a table, and sat at it with the brother, and they ate. Then Francis spoke to all the brothers thus : " My sons, each one must study his own nature. Some can sustain life with less food than others can, so that the body be nourished sufficiently to feed the soul, that it be an efficient servant. As we guard against immoderate eating, so we must do likewise against immoderate fasting." Francis cruelly used his own body, but to his companions he was generous and considerate, knowing his power of resistance was exceptional. And so Francis and the brothers lived at Rivo Torto, leaving it, however, under a strange occurrence essentially mediæval in its quaintness. One day while the brothers were praying in one of the sheds a peasant came with an ass, driving it and encouraging it with these characteristic words, "Get in, O long ears; here we can be comfortable." Francis, ever keenly humorous, saw at once the situation, and said, "My brothers, I know that God has not commanded us to keep an inn for asses, but to pray and show the way to salvation." After this the brothers rose up and left Rivo Torto, to see it no more, and went back to Portiuncula.

I left Rivo and made my way up to the road to Spello and back to Assisi in the deep blue night, such a night as only Umbria provides. As the light of day gives place to rosy twilight, and presently all that was golden and glowing becomes purple and copper-colour, Assisi appears as an enchanted city of some oriental fantastic illumination ; it is as though the night sky had taken possession of the hillside, in which stars are planted that come into being one by one, and twinkle and palpitate in a gauze of warm browns and purples. The electric lights look wondrous lovely in the twilight. Faintly only the outlines of towers and houses are made out against the rose-grey rocky mountain side. Here and there may be made out a gateway, a church, and groups

of buildings; but more adumbrated than expressed. The white road which leads up the hill to the town is bordered with olives, at this time of the evening deep green, relieved from heaviness by the silver colour of their trunks. Upon the still evening air there travels the sound of little bells, a sound which instantly transports the imagination to convent gardens, high walled, and inaccessible, and to that austere life within them, so mysterious in its consequences, mysterious in the marvellous faith of it—a life quite hidden from us in the world, a world all by itself entirely wrapped up in the unseen—a life which, while it draws very near to a purely spiritual existence, is active promptly to the call of suffering. Wherever the plague is, wherever the dying are, wherever war brings agony and desolation, fever and famine, the sisters of the poor are there to suffer with the suffering, or die with the dying. As one wanders slowly up towards the enchanted city, not by a road, but through paths narrow and steep, protected by two tall cypress trees at its gateway, an Umbrian homestead sets another kind of emotion into vibration. Lest (as a stranger) one should disturb the quiet of this sequestered abode, or excite apprehension, one gazes through the leaves of fruit-trees and over the little threshing-floor to a faintly-lit interior wherein a *contadino* family makes the last meal of the day. Songs are being sung, children's voices commingle with women's and men's. Soon, if one waits and watches the bucolic tableau, when the night has gathered its portion and the heavens are deep and dark, the door will be closed, a shutter bolted, and we know ere many minutes these hard-working folk will be resting till before daybreak on the following morning. They will be astir before the morning star is set, bravely starting another day, perchance of not much less than twenty hours, and upon nourishment of dry bread and onions only. Such night walks are among the greatest pleasures

to be acquired in Italy. Foreigners have a kind of established preconception of danger from vindictive criminals who lurk behind corners, pounce out upon a traveller, and knife him. Nothing can be more wide of the truth. One is safer in the Umbrian country at night than in the streets of what is called a civilized town. The hours of darkness are loaded with suggestions which are not disturbed by seeing over much or too distinctly. One can get back into oneself under the cloak of darkness, which does not conceal objects, but temperately veils them. The mind becomes more alert than the eyes, and the imagination is vivid, ingenious, and skilful. Nothing, not even the wildest miracle, seems impossible when the mind is wrapt up in a deep concentration of the infinite, which the night seems to resemble more even than the day. How often disappointment occurs when one has visited a place by daylight, seen the first time by night. Almost complete disillusionment follows. What appeared noble now seems commonplace, evident; what was sensitively suggestive is transformed into the actual, the manifest. There is much more matter visible, so much that it is bewildering. A multitude of impressions crowd upon the vision in quick succession. One is perplexed which one to arrest and maintain. There is such a style given to nature by night. It becomes monumental, like Greek sculpture. Only the grand big things are shown, but not in fog or in blur, for the boundaries of form are as keenly cut out by night as by day, and it is that partly which makes the splendour of even commonplace nature seen by night. Everything seems designed in silhouette. The mind apprehends what the eye cannot see. It is also inquisitive and expectant; it is even apprehensive under the cloak of night—not frightened, but apprehensive. Anything may happen, that is why I said just now that the most unexpected miracle might occur and seem to follow

in natural sequence upon the surrounding mystery. A distant light from a window may inspire an entire story in the mind which desires to investigate what it is that the light is doing, what it is showing, and what concealing. Every sound, the very slightest, is increased in apparent importance and volume in the night, not because it really sounds louder than by day, but because the mind is so drawn in upon itself, is so receptive, as well as creative, then, that it receives impressions through the ear with exaggerated intensity. The imagination is more on the alert while nature is sleeping. Such feelings, so difficult to put into words, and many others, have occupied the mind, when the associations became changed. Almost without knowing it, I was in the silent streets of Assisi, passing the house of Sta. Chiara. Presently I was under the shadow of the house of Bernard of Quintavalli in the Piazza del Vescovado, wherein that early companion of Francis tested the sincerity of Francis' modest piety. The *Fioretti* tells the charming story. Bernard often asked Francis to pass the night in his house. Poor Francis, having no abode, accepted the offer. Bernard one evening, invited Francis to sleep in his chamber. "To hide his holiness," we are told in the *Fioretti*, "the saint cast himself on to a bed, pretending to sleep. Bernard did likewise, and soon began to snore. Francis, believing that Bernard slept, rose up to pray. With his arms extended to heaven, he cried out, 'My Lord and my all'—saying this repeatedly all through the night till morn. Bernard no longer questioned; he joined the company of poor brothers then and there." Presently in the narrow little piazza I passed by the reputed house of Francis' birth, made my way up to the great piazza, where the old Roman temple looked grim, almost sinister, in the darkness, and, midst no sound, no light in a window, sleep presided over the little city. I could hear my footsteps upon the stone flags in whose interstices young

green grass grows ; I walked forward. The long street led up to the great church which rose into being so swiftly, and is the cradle of all that is most beautiful in Italian art. It appeared as a kind of apotheosis of all I had been seeing on that day, of all I had felt. Manifested there is the enormous power and the inexhaustible fountain of love which Francis set flowing in a hard period, a vexed period of much war, until it reached the far corners of the earth whence there come to-day pilgrims by the thousand to worship, not the memory of a dead man, but the existence of a soul that loved and loves much. Before my window there was spread out the whole of the Umbrian Plain, lit now by the waning moon. I think I dreamed more that night than I slept.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS

WHERE now stand the monastery building and Church of St. Francis was a rocky promontory, a spur of Mount Subasio. Barba Rossa's Castle was not far off; it overlooked the promontory. From it Perugia was distinctly seen. Localities of the feudal castles within the commune of Assisi—Sterpeto, Rocca St. Angelo, and St. Gregorio could be easily made out. These baronial strongholds were active in defence of Assisi, were peopled with knights, and were constantly engaged in small wars with the Perugians. Upon this promontory, erected with marvellous engineering skill, there now stand the huge monastery and the lower and upper churches of St. Francis. Begun in 1228, the lower church was completed in four years. The upper church was completed in 1253. The architect was "Jacopo di Alemannia," so called by the Italians, "James the German" in English. This Jacopo had for fellow-worker and designer a friar of the Order of Franciscans, Fra Filippo da Campobello. Italian architecture was very pure in style at this period; but be it said quite frankly, Gothic, as France and Germany and England understood it, never really got into the vernacular of Italy. It never became completely in touch with the Italian race. It was more or less of an exotic; it somehow did not appear to fit in with the Italian temperament, which is classic—by which I do not mean

INTERIOR OF THE LOWER CHURCH, FROM THE WEST

MID-DAY

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sham classic, but traditionally classic, a heritage more than a growth. Italian fancy is different in kind from French, from German and English. It is less playful than the French, less romantic and more spontaneous than the German, more imaginative and brilliant than the English. Italian design of the best period has been more Greek than Roman. The Roman capacity does not seem to create beauty. It may include it, but beauty is not inevitable. The Roman temperament evolves a copy of beauty ; it works on method, upon principles, upon mathematics. The nature of the Roman is analytical. It has shown itself capable by its lawgivers, historians and soldiers, a few great poets, a few great painters, and a great many consummate builders. All through their history the Romans appear a constructive people. Their genius lies in the practical appliance of judicial common sense. The oriental abstract finesse which distinguished the Greek races, and is discovered in the Etruscan and Umbrian, had no place in the scheme of the Roman. The pursuit of abstract beauty for its own sake, and on account of an irresistible instinct for discovery and some arrogance, it took form in collecting, in conquest, borrowing, or copying the æsthetics of other nations. Art was derivative more than indigenous in Rome. That depth of sentiment, inspired mysticism, which commands and compels Etruscan and Umbrian genius, was not the result of assimilation but of personal ecstasy and racial descent. Intense vision appears to have been largely withheld from the Romans, who, busy with the conquest of the world, became collectors of works of art rather than originators, except as regards the technicalities of building. The classical revival in Italy known as the Renaissance was a Roman, much more than a Greek, revival in art. Roman architecture, which was for the greater part debased Greek design, became the ground-work of Renaissance design. But there was, before

the sham classical revival, a real classic survival in Italy, a survival strengthened by Byzantium, the fountain-head of Greek tradition; and however debased the arts became under that empire, however far they departed from classic restraint, they retained a certain dignity and reminiscence of design and beauty of workmanship which was in kinship with the best Greek traditions, and infinitely nearer to them than the sham classic Palladian ever became.[1] In pre-Renaissance work there is no enervating conscious effort, no tiresome logic and scholasticism taking a more important place in art than naïve ideas and romantic fancy. An earlier and severe tradition had not been forgotten, nor do we feel that designers were compelling their technical skill upon us. Traditional styles of building had become second nature, to be departed from, not upon general principles, but only when the genius of an inventor impelled him to do so, and when the vision of a new development was so vivid that it forced itself in front of recorded standards of design. And from the new ground the discoverer became a leader. Thus Jacopo became the leader of the pointed style, a development upon the round arch. He, being a German, probably a Lombard, had been taken into Italy by Frederick II., and were it not that a century and more before his time the pointed arch had been used in the Abbey of Subiaco, it might be reasonably stated that Jacopo brought from Germany the Gothic style. It is needless to reiterate what every well-informed traveller knows. Any one can look up dates with a little trouble. Yet one is reminded of the nearness in point of time of the thirteenth to the twelfth century, also of a certain magnificence of abstract design which was traditionally Byzantine in the churches of St. Francis, hence traditionally Greek, while the wall paintings by Cimabue, Giunta

[1] Rheims Cathedral, destroyed by the Huns during the war, was far more "classic" than St. Peter's in Rome.

da Pisa, Giotto, Simone Memmi, Pietro Cavallini, Pietro Lorenzetti (traditionally Byzantine) bear kinship with Hellenic art. The traditions of design which made the severe art of the Greek and Etruscan vase-painters came down in an unbroken sequence to the great artists of the thirteenth century, especially to those of Umbria and Tuscany. When we are in front of the works of Cimabue and Giotto, we are not very far from the mosaics in Ravenna. We are at least in the company of a classical sequence as well as a classical authority, and when we are before the mosaics in Ravenna we are in touch with Attica. It is true that the later artists achieved greater similarity to nature, that they commanded a more histrionic application in the attitudes of emotion than can be found in Byzantine design. At the same time the monumental precision, the reserve of force, the grasp of big emotion, which are so characteristic of Byzantine art are the guiding elements of the early Umbrian and Tuscan schools, and it is those which bring their artists of the fourteenth century into touch with the Hellenic and Etruscan mood. This is how it is that the art of Cimabue and Giotto bears kinship with Hellenic art. We are led for a moment to remark upon various dates and coincidences which seem to bring the classical painters of Umbria and Tuscany so nearly into immediate touch with the unconsciously classical poet, as well as Christian saint, St. Francis. Francis died in 1226, Cimabue was born in 1240, only fourteen years later. Forty years after Francis' death Giotto saw the light in Vespignano. At least it is possible that Cimabue in his manhood, say of twenty-five years, had come into contact with some of St. Francis' younger contemporaries. Cimabue may have held converse even with Francis' later companions. Thirteen years old when Francis died, Andrea Tafi was his contemporary. Andrea Tafi initiated the release of Tuscan and Venetian art from a somewhat inarticulate

adherence to what had become mannered and immobile. The Byzantine art of design, having a restricted range of motives, retained nevertheless a classic dignity though it inclined to monotony. Andrea set in motion a more direct intercourse with nature, the source of all great art, which extended interpretation and curtailed an excess of mannerism. It is in the Baptistery of Florence that Andrea's work is best known. Andrea and Cimabue were contemporaries, Andrea being the elder by twenty-seven years. Andrea was the pupil of Apollonius, a Greek artist, hence Cimabue was a kind of art grandchild of a Greek. Giunta da Pisa, whose magnificent art is displayed upon two of the transept walls of the upper church in Assisi, was painting in the church in 1236, that is, eight years after the commencement of the fabric. Giunta certainly painted the portrait of Frat 'Elia upon which was the inscription, "F. Helias fecit fieri, Jesu Christe pie miserere peccanti Heliæ. Juncta Pisanus me pinxit, A.D. 1236." So, taking Giunta and Cimabue as the nearest in point of time, Cimabue being born fourteen years after Francis' death, and Giunta, his elder contemporary, we are brought very near to the circumstances of Francis' life, and so, not being far removed from the sources of their making, the traditions which flowed from them are likely to contain reliable if not absolute truth. The speed of the building up of the vast pile is almost incredible. That it was accomplished in four years is an ascertained fact. The decoration of the upper and lower churches progressed with equal swiftness. The most important contributors to it were all contemporaries, if one discounts the unimportant sixteenth- and seventeenth-century additions by painters of considerable skill, but a very long way behind the earlier masters as designers, artists, and poets: artists who were, in no respects, in touch or in sympathy with the

original structure of the church or with the object of its dedication. Francis had in this later period become a sort of saintly pattern or a myth of literary association, with whom the artificial thought of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could find no bond other than that he was an emotional spirit that flourished in barbarian times, whose miracles and biography provided fables sufficiently picturesque for illustration, and sufficiently dramatic for a display of draperies and anatomy. I take no interest whatever in any of the paintings in the lower church, which belong to what is to me a pretty nearly dead time of Italian art, save for the clever portraiture which grew alongside of artificial design. I wish them all away. I want the old frescoes back again, if that could be, which were destroyed by the grammatic rhetorical art and science of a pompous, erratic, and academic period. As that is impossible, I look at the dreary, clever, later works with a certain respect for the ability they display, but with neither reverence nor admiration for the feeling which the artists communicate. Their art in reality amounts mostly to nothing beyond posturing, exaggerated gestures, and unmeaning situations. It is entirely self-conscious and mostly inexpressive. Excellent Vasari, delightful but not always accurate historian, save that he did admire Michelangelo and a few great painters here and there, was too much wrapped up in sham classic to enter with any candid touch into the real Greek spirit, however much, as an historian, he was bound to record its influence. One does not go to such a place as Assisi, Arezzo, or Foligno to see the "portentous actors" in the Drama of Art. One goes to see "the little brothers" of art who used very simple means to register their deep impressions, the sad or gay stories which touched their sensibilities, telling them to the people who, understanding the core of the stories, in like manner understood the

naïve delineation they received. Indeed one regards the entrance of sham classic as an aggressive invasion of artificial culture into the Umbrian and Tuscan territories, and wishes that its votaries had made Rome, Bologna, Naples, and such-like cities the homes for their sport, and had left the precious little mediæval towns alone in their primitive modest beauty. Venice undoubtedly did create glories under the new movements. She gave birth to a great school of painting, and we all bow down before Bellini, Carpaccio, Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese, to name the kings only, and yet somehow does one quite care for their designs and mosaics in St. Mark's? Does not one like the works of these great painters better on canvas than in fresco or mosaic? Is not their art better adapted to sumptuous votive pictures of Apotheosis, of the Glories of Venice, of the Miracle of St. Mark? One feels no resentment in the Scuola di St. Rocco against that mighty designer Tintoretto. Tintoretto fits in well with a highly ornate architecture. He and Sansovino couple well. Yet great as he was, noble as his art is, it could never find a congenial place in Assisi. It is too sumptuous, too ornate, too palatial to find breathing room in the home of the teacher of Divine light through poverty. Assisi, like Delphi, is the home of a story, half reality, half myth; anyhow more than half is an emotional story. The Greek city in the heart of a mountainous region of Phocis owed its fame, its wealth, its place as a sanctuary, to the oracle spoken by the sun god into the ear of a shepherd, who learnt the power and influence of the god from the emotion of the sheep as he watched them. That is the point in the history of Delphi most entrancing, most homely, and most true also as an expression of primitive credence. And the art discovered there in recent years which is most expressive of the meaning of the place in its asso-

ciation with Apollo, is the Archaic, architecture and sculpture alike. The bombastic splendour of Rome, with all its costly setting, all its antiquarian collective ambition and enterprise, would have secured no logical success. It would have struck a wrong note in the Doric scale, and have produced a discord in remote pastoral Delphi. The work of art found there which does suit the soil, the environment, the spirit and poetry of the oracle, is the statue of the charioteer, that queer, beautiful, stately Archaic work, half column, half a youth. To illustrate my meaning more completely, I must enlarge upon it. Upon the Island of Delos there is a rock-hewn Temple, rock-vaulted by great stones placed across from rock wall to rock wall and meeting in the centre, standing in perfect safety by the weight and pressure of one against the other. These form the roof and indicate the pediment. There are two huge stone gates which enclosed the little temple standing, and still on their original bronze hinges. This is the ancient temple to Apollo—no one knows how ancient. It has no architecture, but it conveys solemnity. It is coeval with the faith worshipped within its gate and walls. It is perhaps man's first making of a stone shrine to the sun god in the place of his birth. However ornate, however manipulated, no late classical building upon the island could have, or has, so expressive an utterance as this embryonic creation, which speaks in a rude language of an intensely romantic and abstract appeal, of all that Helios meant to the archaic Greek mind, so different from the Apollo of a later and more self-conscious period. And at Præneste, now called Palestrina, are the remains of the great temple to Fortune, gradually built up and restored by Hadrian, erected upon terraces mounting up from the plain of the Roman Campagna. Imposing as they are, interesting as they are to the historian, the archæologist,

and the architect, they do not touch the chord of romance, which was the echo, sounding faintly, of prehistoric times in Italy, of strange beliefs, of oracles and miracles, at a time when mankind sought to be in close communication and touch with the unseen. To believe to be is surely on the way to being. More or less self-conscious adjustments of forms to commemorate and to perpetuate for generations, though differently constituted, differently poised, are still active. The obscure belief in omens is presented at Præneste, now Palestrina. The cave where dwelt the Goddess of Fortune, Dea Fortuna, where she spoke her oracles, even to the wise Cicero, is there still and is venerated. So ancient a cult is her cave-worship in Præneste that her cave-temple is surrounded with Pelasgian walls, of far later date than the obscure period of the origin of the worship of Dea Fortuna, and so venerated has been the cult through subsequent ages that the greatest temple in Italy gradually rose up around the sacred spot, and became as celebrated for Italy as Delphi was for Greece, and the ancient temple to Helios was for the island of Delos. The gods love caves. Zeus had his at Dictys, Helios his at Delos, Dea Fortuna had hers at Præneste. Hence it is obvious that cave-worship is very ancient, and far beyond any historical record. From the most remote times, to the hermits in Alexandria, of India, and up to those of the hermits of Italy, from whom the monastic system emanated, the cave has always been a dominant feature in connection with religions. About and around the cave of St. Benedict at Subiaco the great abbey has flourished. About the caves which Francis loved, wherein he found darkness which gave light to his soul, churches and monasteries have been erected. In a cave Francis conceived, initiated, and wrote the rules of the Order. My readers may wonder why I am

LOWER CHURCH, FROM WEST END

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writing about caves when the subject of this chapter is the Church of St. Francis. Probably not by accident, probably entirely by design, the lower church is like a cave. It is not only a crypt to support the upper church or a place of burial, it speaks otherwise than of that. Now, would James the German have thought of a symbol which is intimately associated with the cave-dwelling Anchorites and especially with St. Francis? Who then conceived this poetical figure and interpretation in stone, the very soul of the life of retirement, of light in darkness, of complete segregation, which Francis adopted that he might solve the difficulties his soul presented to him; that he might come into the full light out of the dimness of a vision which was to break forth in practical splendour? As a symbol of Faith the church was to be erected, richly adorned, and dedicated to the Goddess of Poverty whose beauty was discovered by Francis in the caves of Rivo Torto and the Carceri. Brother Elias was alive and active, in 1228 he was the first general of the Order, and as the custom has always been so, he had something, if not a great deal, to say about the plan, not only for the conventual buildings, but for the church which was to receive the body of the saint and to commemorate his memory for all time. We know that Fra Filippo da Campobello was a friar of the Order, and that he was associated with Jacopo di Alemannia as architect or master-mason, probably both. I submit, then, that the lower church was intended to symbolize, in a measure to imitate, a cave. Being so it embodies, as well as illustrates, Francis' life, his place of inspiration, his marriage with poverty, his absolute negation of all worldly goods, and his solitude, as well as being the receptacle of the tomb for his useless and despised body. I submit that, being erected upon this cave, the upper church

symbolizes the realization of St. Francis' ideal, his paradise discovered, the completion of the revelation from heaven after solitude and poverty, and the re-creation of light out of darkness. Out of darkness we shall ascend to light. Let us for a moment examine the lower church with this idea fresh in our minds. The building faces nearly east and west, but, as is often the case in Italian churches, the apse and the altar are at the west, not at the east end. The lower church is entered by a door and through a vestibule, which do not belong to the original plan. The vestibule was erected in 1487, more than two centuries after the completion of Jacopo's and Fra Filippo's design, and most of the side chapels of the lower church were built at a somewhat earlier period. Passing through the vestibule and looking to the west we pause. The place is almost dark. That is the first impression. It seems to resemble a blue vaulted cave. There is no architecture save four huge truncated bastions from which the arched vault springs. Early morning is the best time to visit the lower church for the first time, so that a strong impression of solitude may be received. Almost hopeless sadness is suggested. The gloom may strike the sensitive visitor and perhaps produce a chill of disappointment, and perhaps beget a grim impression at the first glance, almost amounting to repulsion. At the extreme west end and in the apse, are three windows set deep in the recess of thick walls. These convey the only light visible from the atrium. The windows are in the head of the cross which forms the ground-plan. I suggest that they may symbolize the Three Persons of the Trinity. The windows are of equal size, but of unequal number, and they were the cause of the lighting of the original church before the side chapels and their windows were added. At first glance all we can construct out of the velvety gloom

LOWER CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS, ASSISI

(*By permission of M. J. Rendall, Esq.*)

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are three commanding lights, like eyes shining white from the umbrage of the deep-blue vault, and slightly refracting on to a grey stone pavement. The cave-like tunnel is saved from perpetual gloom by the penetration of the sun through the windows in the afternoons, and towards the time of his setting he floods the walls and vaults with gold and crimson. At the beginning of the day there seems scarcely any hope of light. There would be none but for the three eyes of light, which only suggest radiance by a cold white veil. Promise will find fulfilment; the almost sad investment created by darkness will be presently cast aside. The gates of the sun will be opened, light will pour in, the cave will be alive with gold and blue, and glittering as if studded with gems. The church is no longer a tomb, a receptacle for a dead idea of murmuring prayer, a place of sorrow where doubt dwells. It is filled with light and joy. It echoes hymns of praise when the strains of the Ave Maria ascend as incense and mingle with the last rays of the declining sun, the sun that will rise to-morrow and always.

> Praise to Thee, my Lord, with all Thy creatures,
> Especially the honoured Brother Sun,
> Who makes the day and illumines us through Thee.
> And he is beautiful and, radiant with great splendour,
> Bears the signification of Thee, Most High One.

This lower church signifies the cave of hope, the abode of prayer, the domicile of self-abnegation; it was made after the pattern of the hermits' homes, presently to palpitate with quiet frescoes created by men who believed in what they were doing, who wrought what they mentally saw, who fashioned their pictures with all the truth and beauty they could gather together from tradition, from each other, and from the ever-fresh fountain of God's creation. As if to insist upon the cavern, Time has willed the

practical destruction of the wall-paintings by Giunta and his pupils upon the walls of the single nave, and it is not till we arrive near to the high altar that the beautiful interchanges of blue, red, yellow, and white arrest and begin to satisfy the eye after the darkness. "Corpus est cella nostra, et anima est eremita qui moratus intus in cella ad ornandum Dominum et me ditandum de ipso."—Francis in *Speculum Salvationis*. As we proceed westward we need not do more than notice the painting of the Last Judgment upon the apse. It is a clever but wholly uninteresting performance. Its only merit is that it is dark in tone, hence it is not aggressive. It is simply an academic work, like so much of the wall-painting of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries here and all over Italy. Over the high altar, which was erected over the burying-place of St. Francis, and hence in a conspicuous and appropriate situation, are depicted three principal virtues of St. Francis—Poverty, standing in thorns, being given as bride by Christ to St. Francis, Chastity seated within a fortress to which Francis conducts his little brothers, and Obedience symbolized by a woman wearing a yoke. In the fourth pendentive Francis is enthroned, grasping a cross, and handling the rules of the Order, surrounded by groups of singing angels. That these pictures are by Giotto there can hardly be a doubt, though in recent years a well-known Italian authority has claimed that they are not by the hand of that master. I believe they are by him, but I cannot agree with certain critics who maintain that they present his highest point of attainment. Unquestionably there are great beauties to be found within them, of design and colour, but the painter seems to me to have been led by occult pressure out of the region of his simple and naïve art, and into one of not entirely satisfactory allegory which does not fit well with the direct, almost naturalistic, art of Giotto. Fra

Angelico could have handled the rather Dantesque subject-matter with greater success, and Signorelli better still. I confess to having studied these particular designs of Giotto without deriving great pleasure from them, or perhaps with the feeling that the singularly direct and homely painter Giotto, I won't say was out of his depth, but outside his genius in these instances. There is left upon the mind a conjecture that the glorification of St. Francis had been suggested by a didactic theologian not entirely in touch with the modest Francis or with the straightforward Giotto. The Francis of the Cave, of Mount Averna, of the "little portion," I miss here. I see a Francis who was to be used for theological and Vatican purposes. One does not desire to push a surmise of this kind, and I would not write it if I did not encounter the feeling upon every visit to the church. No doubt traditional sentiment carries weight and is in many persons strong. I feel free, however, to criticize and to weigh my admiration when it is, I hope, heartily appreciative upon the whole. To see visualized the most splendid sentiment or, to express it better and more strongly, the majestic apotheosis of divine love mingling with human suffering, and with it contrasted, we must go hard by and stand long before the Madonna enthroned, with Francis standing by her side, unquestionably by Cimabue. Hellenic restraint, Byzantine symbolism, and the noblest Christianity meet here. We stand before a Woman of chaste dignity, a Virgin Mother, a benign goddess with an untroubled gentle outlook which radiates from her strange wistful eyes. By her side is a poor, ragged, unkempt man, apparently an inspired enthusiast of an ancient race, whose skin is scorched with exposure to the sun, and furrowed by driving hail. A man who knows hunger and thirst, a countenance wherein beauty is hidden. Watch the face. It will change from burning love to deep sorrow, not for himself, but sorrow for the suffering of Another.

I see all this in Cimabue's portrait of Francis of Assisi. Cimabue has painted The St. Francis, to me the only entirely satisfactory presentation of him to be found here or elsewhere. I see the son of rich parents, the man who took over the sufferings of his Master and made them his own, who in the uncouthness of his body was received in the likeness of Christ, and who has no comeliness save what has been made by his soul. I cannot describe it; people must feel this impressive figure for themselves. If everything of value in art in Assisi were to perish, and this alone remained, it would be worth a pilgrimage to see it. Next in significant efficiency of design, and of great nobility, showing a dramatic command over a variety of subtle emotions never excelled, is "The Deposition from the Cross" attributed to Puccio Capanna, contemporary and pupil of Giotto. I accept tradition, though the passion and invention displayed might point to Simone Memmi as the author. New attributions may prove deceptive, and, without entire evidence and every link in the chain complete, it is far wiser to believe what tradition tells than to hazard a new name upon slight material, so much the fashion among certain critics just now. The chances are that the old attribution is correct. Whoever the painter was that made this noble picture matters little by the side of the fact that a great man made it. For depth of feeling, for force of design, for abstract qualities of interpretation of a great motive by harmony and contrasts of line and majestic rhythm, the artist who made this is the forerunner of Signorelli and Michelangelo, who, both of them, when they visited Assisi, found in it something to emulate, even to copy. Originality, in the sense in which there is such an affected and unreasonable demand just now, was by no means thought indispensable in the great days of art. Artists borrowed right and left, not only from their antecedents, but contemporaries; but while

THE BLESSED VIRGIN, CHILD CHRIST, ANGELS, AND ST. FRANCIS

(Cimabue)

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borrowing they created something new out of an inspiring motive. Much that we see in the upper and lower churches is conceived upon a pattern. I have seen in Mistrâ, the Byzantine Sparta, a little church covered with frescoes which might have been painted by the pupils of Giotto, and another similar though of later date at Daphne, between Athens and Eleusis, where the motives of the frescoes are so nearly related as to be almost identical with those of Giotto in the Arena Chapel in Padua. If a painter is endowed with a great mind, whatever he may borrow, or whatever direction he takes, he makes his own by force. By force I mean that, without knowing he is doing so, he adds his personality to another's—he creates an addition, not a subtraction. When Michelangelo borrowed from the sculptured designs upon the west front of San Petronio in Bologna, and made them the embryo of the Adam and Eve Creation series upon the vault of the Sistine Chapel, he added to his own glory and did not subtract from the genius of the great artist Jacopo della Quercia. The history of art is so made. When Raphael borrowed from the style of Michelangelo he retained his prepossessions—he did not give them away. Vasari places the Sienese Quercia as the leader of the second part of his history, hence making acknowledgment of the claims which one artist has upon his predecessors. The Fine Arts are not "egoistic separate statements." They have been gradually evolved and built up, and present a series of different strata in the same fabric. When the critics now in fashion crave for novelty and applaud it, however bad, incomplete, even childish, it may be, they show how very lightly the history of evolution has impressed their sense of fitness or judgment. And so the horrors of much modern art are esteemed righteous, whereas they are in reality unreasonable

and evanescent. Being diseased at their birth, death will soon ease the Arts of them. With this little digression, which seems to me opportune, if not imperative, we pass to the great fresco of the Crucifixion by Pietro Cavallini, pupil of Giotto. This work has been attributed recently to Pietro Lorenzetti, with what justification I am bound to say I do not know—it is not a bit like Lorenzetti's work. It is a very splendid picture, however, rich in colour, somewhat heraldic in design, and yet not wanting in movement or vitality. It is a picture perhaps more fitted for the student of art than the public ; for many are the æsthetic problems which it solves, and which have never been better solved. I allude to the many and varied colours and tones which under less skilful hands might easily have produced confusion and discord. Using them frankly, the master has created a brilliant scheme and rendered it throughout harmonious. The eye is not only stimulated with enchanting colours, but satisfied with a complete tonality as conspicuous as in any of the noble works of Spinello Aretino in Arezzo, and Piero della Francesca in Borgo S. Sepolcro. The painters whose work enriches the north and south transepts are named by tradition, and until much stronger evidence has been produced than appears up till now, it will be wise to accept it as true—Cimabue, Giotto, Taddeo Gaddi, Giovanni di Milano, Puccio Capanna, Giottino, Simone Memmi, and Pietro Cavallini. Every compartment in the admirable scheme is worthy of continued study. It may be advanced with truth that the very small area which comprises the two transepts, roof, and walls, presents Tuscan and Umbrian art at their purest, emotionally at their best. Here is religious feeling expressed with naïve simplicity. The elements which compose design, colour, and form meet the motive and are embraced in it. Motive and execution harmonize. The painters have used their art as

simply and directly as the historians told their story. Hence the charm, hence the truth of what we see. Inspired by events which touched Italy from north to south, events so recent that they were almost contemporaneous, the painters threw themselves heart and soul into recording them, recording them not only as memories, certainly not as pegs on which to hang self-conscious egotism, but as forces which stood to command for generations. Every school of painting has been more or less, sooner or later, influenced by these forces, because, however far afield art wandered from primitive sincerity, however frivolous, however pedantic, however reckless, movements in art have been, an undercurrent of influence has continued its course, bearing purer water along, while the surface was often stagnant or boisterous, and the stream deep or shallow. Sir Joshua Reynolds was apparently blind to primitive art. He was saturated with the fashion of his time, and the pedantry and prose of it all, its stilted cold academicism, and its rigid respectability, its Johnsonian classic and Pope's artificial couplets, were each and all of them completely out of touch æsthetically, even ethically, with any Art which, if not intense, if not superstitious, if not democratic, was nothing. One man in a blank century, as regards imaginative decorative, as well as intense design, William Blake, represented that undercurrent of pure water coming down from the original fount, whose springs radiate from the heights of Parnassus. William Blake had much in common with the Umbrian and Tuscan painters of the thirteenth century, and often in the upper and lower churches at Assisi one is reminded of him. The great Englishman, or I believe in reality he was a Kelt, who had never seen primitive art, was the spiritual brother of Giotto and the rest of the great Umbrians and Tuscans. He might have been a follower of Francis—he would have been, had he been an Italian born in the thirteenth

century. But there is a greater name than Blake which comes uppermost in one's mind, Michelangelo. I do not believe that Sir Joshua Reynolds, with all his laudation of Michelangelo, really got at the heart of his work or really saw the depth of it. He was impressed by the bigness of style, he was infused with qualities with which the art of Michelangelo is sometimes, if not overcome, embarrassed; qualities which embrace science and mannerism, an overheated imagination, and a strong inclination towards science which sometimes began to produce havoc. The noblest efforts of that great genius surely are where his art has been most restrained, where it is most like nature in that respect, where it has been inspired by some deep pathos, where human emotions of the noblest have touched some sorrowful sympathy in his sensitive nature, where the motive is least didactic and the design is calm and moderate. Parts of the paintings upon the vault of the Sistine Chapel which have been least written about and least noticed, the lunettes and the inverted spandrels, contain the noblest because simplest productions of the great Florentine. In them his art appears as serene and intense as Giotto's, as stately as Cimabue's or Giunta da Pisa's, as passionate also, without excess, as Puccio Capanna shows us in "The Deposition." Michelangelo drank of the pure stream from Parnassus here in Assisi. We know he was here, and he took away much with him which, becoming absorbed and digested, reappeared under the compelling power of his distinguished personality. Bernini and the like tempestuous artists, by the side of whom Michelangelo's work—which at its most daring point of excess is what the extreme modern critic would call "dull and lifeless," because it was noble even in its excess—partook of no inspiration from the Greek stream, but from bubbling Roman wells Bernini and the Barocco school caught some spray which they exaggerated

DEPOSITION FROM THE CROSS

By Puccio Capanna. Reproduced from a copy made by Signor Falcinelli of Assisi

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into a sea of boiling foam and artificial waterfalls. Their excesses affirm their weakness. Their fantastic gesticulation verifies that they had never seen or felt, and never could appreciate, the solemn steps of an Hellenic dance, or the modesty and beauty of its presentation upon a Greek vase. They were Roman stylists playing with passion. The great Umbrians under our thoughts at this moment were descendants from the vase-painters of Attica and Etruria. They were, as it were, born out of a Greek Amphora or Lecythus. They came on in a sequence, not by chance, but as a phalanx in evolution. Even if the children were not always beautiful, always chaste and admirable, they were of their mother. Byzantine art with all its gaunt exaggeration was the child of Greece. The Umbrians, Giotto and Cimabue and the like, were the grandchildren of Greece, even if they came through Byzantine bastards. I have indicated the spirit in which we should approach a study of the primitive painters' work in the Church of St. Francis so far, but there is yet another state of mind in which we must seek to confer with them, and deliberately. If primitive art is to be understood in its entirety, its intensity and absolute veracity to environment and temperament, its innocent sincerity, must be received as an axiom. Quite unlike, indeed to the very root of it dissimilar, are the vagaries of the modern so-called Primitives, P. Impressionists, Cubists, and Heaven knows how many more "ists", to the real thing, as unlike as a monkey is to a man. The one jabbers nonsense, imitates, and plays the hopeless mountebank, the other is a progressive, intelligent animal, made so by tradition, respectful to his predecessors, and much less of an egoist than the ape. The Italian primitives were searchers for truth, their modern mimics are snatchers for any falsehood to justify an ephemeral existence. They laboured in tradition, they brought forth through tradition, they grew

out of tradition, but each one of them tried to make his work *as like nature as he could.* The Italian primitive was not eccentric or affected; he was all the time striving, urging himself to tell whatever story he had behind his art with as accurate and as near an approach to fact as it appeared to him and he had power to express it. Believing implicitly, and without criticism higher or lower, the Christian pagans, painters and writers, approached mysteries with childlike simplicity, and so they related them. Painters and the people, and painters were of the people and mostly of peasant breed, believed that such and such a thing happened exactly as the Gospel told or as tales narrated. They believed that another and later series of miraculous events occurred even in their time, that Divine intervention had happened exactly as related by chroniclers, which things they took for granted as a child in these days believes that "Jack and the Beanstalk" is a true story and all Grimm's charming tales are exquisite facts which ought to be happening now if they are not; and in many a child's mind are indeed happening, if we elders could read their thoughts and were ingenuous enough to apprehend the abstract truths that reside within the figurative imagination of childhood. When Cimabue was painting the Madonna and Francis, there can be no doubt he verified his vision in a form agreeable to his motive. He was trying, trying with all his might, to present his ideal of a pure and beautiful woman, abounding in compassion, and yet as Queen of Heaven somewhat detached from mortals, but still in close sympathy with them. It may have been, and probably was, that the great artist had seen a beautiful peasant mother whose dignity of bearing suggested an ideal to him, and haunted his fancy. And, perhaps unconsciously, he copied the vision as it left its impression upon him and had become

a reality. He formed an *image*. The painter repeated what he had seen, he was impelled to do that, hence we are impelled to receive his vision which he translated into flesh and blood, so living is it. I have dwelt upon this picture because it presents the reawakening of life in art; because it is Greek in the great simplicity of its design, as it is Christian in the human feeling it pronounces. It is not only decoration, the appeal it makes is universal. And in this connection Cimabue may be well called the parent of a new art which created a new emotion out of an ancient cult, the worship of the beauty, dignity, and queenship of womanhood. As a theme, it has of course been a favourite one with all Italian painters, none of whom touched it in conjunction with motherhood with more depth of feeling than Michelangelo! Upon the triangular spaces on the vault of the Sistine Chapel are depicted a man, a woman, two children, repeated in groups upon each space. Unquestionably these groups represent the Holy Family by symbols of extreme expressiveness. The same or an analogous inspiration produced these works of Michelangelo's as we have noted in the work of Cimabue. Upon the countenance of the The Woman, for it is always Mary, every emotion is told—anxiety, fear, tenderness, patience, and love, appear in turn. This conception of Michelangelo's covers the ground, as it were, of all the possible emotions which Mary endured in her anxious or her joyful motherhood. Michelangelo conveyed in these designs a strong conviction in the living force of Love. It is evident that the types and expressive features were directly studied from nature. It was due to direct study from nature, as seen by a poet's mind and eye, that Cimabue and Michelangelo achieved their great success. They were deeply touched; hence, having been men of genius, they touch us, and through ordinary nature seen with the spirit of human emotion. Neither

Cimabue's Virgin Mary nor Michelangelo's women, to which I allude, are in the least degree classical as regards formula. They do not present measured or symmetric beauty; they are as far removed from a sham classical type as they could possibly be. The two great artists added a great deal to art which even the Greek felt but faintly. The worship of Mary in her divinity as Mother of Jesus and of humanity, inspired the Christian painters with a kind of ideal to be wrought from humanity, of which the Greek had only a glimmer. If the spirit which is within the greatest art, and especially that of the thirteenth century, is to be found, it must be looked for in the cavern, the cell, the forests, it will be found still in primitive representatives of a great race in the persons of peasants, of soil-workers, and such as are in direct communion with nature, and it will appear again from its original source. I have dwelt upon this section of my subject, and perhaps in an unexpected manner, because it seemed to me to be a necessary step in the understanding of art which is intense, which found something deep down in the mind to express, and which has not been executed for art's sake, but for a reason far nobler and more lasting, as Emerson said, "for man's sake." Perhaps also in this way to remind my readers that pictures, like people and books, must be studied long and patiently before they begin to be understood. And I would insist that the greater the art, the greater the idea has been which inspired it; to the few only is it given to comprehend it. I have no desire to make a guide-book, I would like to suggest an atmosphere. Your Murray or other guides will give you facts, and the New Critics will give you fresh names for the authors of things you see, all excellent and valuable in a way. But those facilities are but superficial. Who would study great art must go through the discipline of labour and *learn*

to see by effort on the one hand and with sympathy on the other. To find another keynote to the great chord which vibrates in such solemnity, echoed from the walls of the cavern, one must study The Crucifixion painted by Giotto upon the wall over and against the pulpit; this must not be missed. I leave you with this lovely creation to enjoy what always seems to me one of the most exquisite as well as restrainedly pathetic works of the Tuscan and Umbrian schools. And so we leave the lower church to ascend to the upper, and to a different atmosphere. There are two ways of entrance to the upper church, one from the higher level of the piazza, the other from the lower level by passing out of the south transept, through the sacristy, and up a spiral staircase. Both entrances should be taken advantage of, the lower one because of the impressive contrast between the darkness of the lower church and the joyful exhilarating space and light of the upper. The higher entrance also should be adopted with a view to the reception of a general impression of size, of height, of fair and lovely colour which immediately greets the eye when one has passed through the church door opening out of the higher piazza. Passing through the sacristy of the lower church, we need only glance up at the clever paintings upon the vault. They are amazing as perspective feats, and shortened distortions. They present conquest over mathematical and technical difficulties which have in reality very little to do with fine art. They represent a phase in the history of painting best adapted to, and most in accord with, the theatre or ball-room or place of mixed assembly, where sobriety of thought and calm intellectual enjoyment need no encouragement. Ascending a spiral staircase, we find ourselves in the sacristy of the upper church, which, by the flood of light shining upon its whitened walls, prepares the eye presently to enjoy a

scheme of colour which is presented upon vault, on clusters of columns, walls, and windows. Everywhere there is colour, but it is very fair, partly, no doubt, because it has been washed away during centuries of careless or senseless friars who left the upper church to decay, and it would have gone to complete ruin had it not been made in recent years "a monument" by the Italian Government which has saved it. It was a wise thing to take from careless and ignorant friars works which can never be replaced, the like of which can never be done again. When I first saw this monument to Francis, to Jacopo, to Cimabue and Giotto, it was fast falling away. The roof was leaking, wet poured down the frescoes, plaster was hanging like shreds from the walls, and the very stones were mouldering away under the damp. The church had been denuded of its furniture, which is now restored to it, and this is much to be thankful for, and whatever criticisms might be passed I refrain from, because of my thankfulness for what has been done, and for the most part very well done. The upper church indeed presents a change after the lower in aspect as well as motive. New thoughts arise. We are above the earthly life. We are as near to a promise of perfection as can be made by mortal hands. We have passed through the cave of uncertainty, of symbol, of promise. We stand *in* light, light above, on either side, at our feet—all day long it is light here, from the first touch of the sun when he mounts above Subasio, to his last rays as he passes away. There is no mystery, there is no suggestion of struggle, of disappointment, of inefficiency. We are in the atmosphere of achievement and perfection, of attainment beyond doubt, of more than hope, of entire realization. There is no more gay building in the world, gay I mean in the sense of cheerfulness, partly due, I think, to the lively spring-like colour

UPPER CHURCH

Frescoed Walls by Cimabue, Giunta da Pisa, and others

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which covers every wall, moulding, and surface. There is no hint of fortress, no fear of attack, no anticipation of an enemy here. High and numerous windows render the church as light as the piazza. Light crosses everywhere and everything. The darkest notes in the whole building are the niches in a narrow clerestory which runs along the upper portion of one side of the transept, and these are figured with angels upon an azure ground made by Cimabue in his gayest colour mood. We already have forgotten all the sufferings of Francis as we pass from one to another of Giotto's pictures figuring the chief events of his life. They are records of his life, they interpret keen purpose and sustained enthusiasm, and thus they reflect much of the character, indeed most of the character, of the man who was above all things happy, even in suffering. So the building truly pictures him well from its stones to its pictures. Let me tell my readers how to begin to understand this shrine. You can always get into the upper church from early morning to sunset. Take with you a camp-stool and your Italian *Fioretti*, or S. Evans' translation of the *Speculum Salvationis*, or better still both, and read them there. And while you are doing so, go from one to the other of Giotto's pictures, but don't read as you look at the pictures ; that is the way *not* to see them. Get the subjects which they depict well and firmly knit in your minds, enter into them with your own personality, as well as throw yourself back into a simple time when ignorant men were often very wise and everybody was very intense, either good or bad, and there was very little of a dull *via media* anywhere, and *no compromise*. Presently you will find yourselves getting into the mood when you will be ready to see Giotto's work and to think a little as he was thinking, and perhaps somewhat as the little brother was thinking seven hundred

years ago. To attain the proper mood to enjoy, then to understand a work of art is half way to fulfilment. Surely that principle applies in every case, even quite divergent from the one we are just now considering. You would not take the same mood to St. Peter's at Rome as you would bring to the Parthenon. Moods must be adjusted to accord with a vast variety of enterprises. Michelangelo's works, overwhelming as they are with all the strange splendour of his design, demand a different kind of understanding from that which Phidias or Ictinus claims. Nor even can one carry to Raphael the kind of estimation or temporary equipment necessary to a complete or even partial understanding of the delicate and exquisitely conceived and arranged abstractions of Botticelli. It is for the reason of the many-sidedness of the arts, for the many decades and centuries of different qualities and degrees of thought and enterprise, that it is difficult for the average person to comprehend any work of art, except perhaps that one which makes no demand upon effort of will or intellect, or claims more than ephemeral attention. I do not write for the people—and there are many of them—who come to Assisi for a day, perhaps two, who leave their cars at the door of the church, uplift their goggles, glance round in curiosity, receive no impression, and might just as well have remained at home, and who, having brought nothing with them, take nothing away. These folk are not made to understand such things as we are considering. I write in the hope that there are many travellers who wish to learn how to see, how to think, and how to enjoy a work of art; and who may have already realized that without taking a great deal of trouble even they, perhaps quick and intelligent, cannot begin to fathom the depths of a great work of art. The student of art and literature should dispense with

THE BISHOP'S THRONE, UPPER CHURCH, ASSISI

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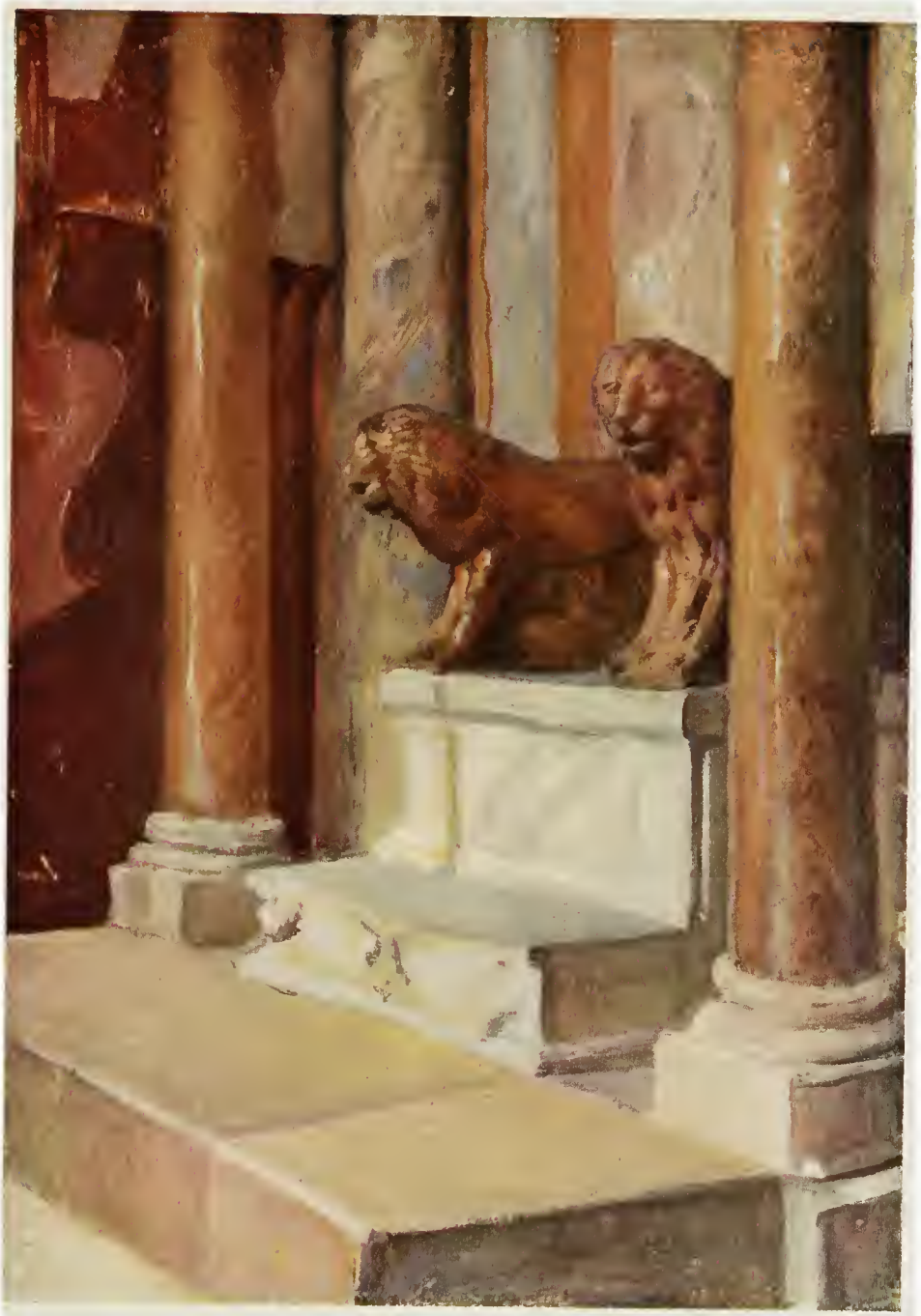

egoism and all prejudices before he will be at the beginning of a position to reject any of the multitudes of emotions and intellectual efforts which have gone to the making of architecture, sculpture, painting, and literature, in their long and various attempts to say something worthy to impress, and worthy of heritage; and yet while I say this, I am guilty of a strong expression of dislike for certain shams, as they appear to be to me. The neglect to which the upper church has been subject, partly on account of its size, as well as because it has never been the object of pilgrimage, is due to the fact that it retains its original character unmolested by sham classic and the vandals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who knocked away precious works of art to set up hideous Jesuit altars in the lower church. As a monument to the genius of the thirteenth century, the upper church is almost, if not entirely, unique. Thank Heaven the hands of the sham classics found no field here for their broken pediments, and energetic or desultory angels blowing trumpets and appearing in all kinds of ignoble attitudes, kicking their heels in fantastic and ballet-dancer postures. The unworthy art of which such things are adjuncts never entered into this fair and lovely church. Providence has protected it! We see it now very much as Jacopo, Frate Elias, and Fra Filippo da Campobello designed it, and as Giunta da Pisa, Cimabue, and Giotto adorned it, making it, for exquisite design and colour, as precious as a missal and as finished in every detail, and doing this long before pedants and purists had begun to prate about the "Purity of Stone" and the barbarity of a period which permitted its desecration by design and colour, and of artists that dared to make it alive, delightful to the eye, and suggestive to the imagination. Yes, the church sings with colour like a meadow or wood on a spring day. That is, I

think, the first impression received, and it takes a long time to concentrate oneself upon any one object in such a fair variety of gently harmonious tints. The eye wanders in pleasant vagueness from roof to floor, all the time in keen enjoyment of a feast of delicate colour which passes on without let or hindrance, without gaps or discords, providing exquisite felicity and entire satisfaction. One almost forgets that the walls are pictured with events which happened centuries ago, and are also peopled with remote figures of early Hebrew history, one passes so swiftly from one delight of colour and design to another. Alas, so many of the pictures, especially those which occupy the higher portions of the walls, have suffered grievously from past neglect and the irremediable ravages of time. But there is enough remaining of Cimabue's noble designs to provide months of study in vault and clerestory. The lower portion of both walls was decorated by Giotto and his pupils with pictures from events in the life of Francis. I think it is pretty certain that various hands were employed on these pictures, indeed it almost goes without saying that Giotto could not have executed such a vast scheme without assistants. And indeed the merit varies, some of the pictures being better in execution as well as in design than others are, but that is an inevitable fact and invariably occurs when the work of one mind, or even the inspiration of one mind, covers a very large space. As an instance, students of the frieze of the Parthenon in the British Museum have doubtless discovered a considerable variety of excellence, less notable in the design of the procession than in the execution of its parts. Whereas some portions of this incomparable frieze are executed with perfect skill and with a finish as complete as marble can receive, others are less admirably carved; this inequality is not to be regretted, it is just natural. Such ups and

downs always occur when it has been necessary to employ many assistants on account of the scale of an undertaking. It would be beside the mark to blame Giotto or Phidias for faults which are inevitable in the area of a vast and complicated design. Unquestionably Giotto entered into the Franciscan mood heart and soul. Its romance touched him, its grim naïveté inspired him. He was near enough to the time of the world-moving events which occurred one after another during the twenty years' ministry of Francis, and which lost nothing in their telling by scribes, to imbibe the essence of every event he depicted. It is not history painting, it is a lucid presentation and reflection of contemporary feeling, of contemporary veneration and belief, which Giotto conveys. He makes us feel that we stand looking on, that we are spectators of each scene as it is unfolded to us by a great dramatic painter who told a story in paint as well as, if not better than, any one else has done. And not by any artifice, but by the sheer force of character and invention of Giotto, we are translated into a time, an environment, as unlike our own as it is possible to conceive—a time which was the reverse of sceptical, which was in a degree barbarous,—of intensity of conviction, of stern, perhaps also cruel, manhood, yet having behind this a vigilant outlook which belonged to an age wherein emotion accepted the aid of reason while it drove the inevitable laws of life with vigour and purpose. Science had not yet set out to destroy a visionary world. It is exactly this which Giotto tells us, tells us not in the least self-consciously, but directly, concisely, and entirely adequately. In this sense Giotto's work is Greek. When my readers have studied the art of Tuscany and Umbria they will not be surprised that I call it Greek, and that I submit that it bears no kinship to any Renaissance or Revival. It was neither of one nor of the

other. It was an indirect survival of Athenian art through Byzantium, which was grafted upon a new stock quite prepared by race and temperament to receive it. The roots of Athenian art had never died, even if its leaves and flowers withered and it became in a sense degenerate. So close is fifth-century Greek art to early Tuscan in feeling, that if a Greek of that period could see the works of Giunta, Cimabue, and Giotto, he would recognize them as his brethren in the art, with whom he could claim close fellowship; but I think the reverse would happen if he were to be presented to academic art, the result of the science of the Renaissance, the result of too much reason, too little heart. I think he would say, "This belongs to Rome, my conqueror and my destroyer, and not to me." As architecture, the upper church of St. Francis is a simple and yet highly thought-out edifice, simple in proportion, restrained in ornament, and is to me a nearer relation to a Greek temple than any building I know which claims to be erected on classical formulæ. It has great sobriety of aspect, extreme grace and elegance of form and arrangement of masses; it is severe, and without pedantry; it is highly poetic, without any tricks to make it appear so. It is so broad and virile in style that at first glance one is unconscious of the architecture, or rather it is not forced upon one. This charming effect of constructive mystery and concealment, I should say, of artifice, is in a measure due to the colour and pattern with which every portion of stone is covered, and which does bring the whole design together, so that one's memory of the church is that there is a great space walled in, arched over, and made lovely by colour. The effect fills the heart with joy and enlivens every æsthetic sense. Sunday mornings may add another delight, the sense of sound. Gregorian High Mass is sung then, and one can sit quietly and be transported

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as it were, on a magic mental carpet, to the days when Jacopo and his associates had just achieved their triumph. Mass is now sung every Sunday in the upper church. It used not to be, for the upper church has not been as popular as the lower. This perfect contribution to the arts of the thirteenth century of Greek Gothic, if I may coin a term, must remain for all time one of the four or five most entirely poetical buildings in Europe. The purist and the architect, who may be vexed at the "desecration of stone" by colour, can go there to learn to put off a pedantic prejudice, and perhaps to admit that the interest and charm of architecture as one of the arts is augmented, not diminished, by the entry within its domain of incidents of form and colour which the sculptor, painter, and designer bring. Architecture may stand alone, but in doing so she becomes a nude art, she needs vestment. I have purposely refrained from making a catalogue of the subjects which were chosen to tell various biblical and mediæval stories; I have only alluded to them. In the first place such a commentary or description would have been outside my intention and foreign to the design of this little book. I have been trying to make visitors pause, think, consider, and read—to suggest to their minds, more than to supply them with facts, to help them to enter into the spirit of the two churches, into that spirit which controlled their initial design and inspired every artist who had a hand therein, and many another. And so I leave these two great monuments with a feeling of regret, with a feeling that what I have written is quite inadequate. And as we are leaving, and not going out of the door into the upper piazza, let us descend into the lower church, walk down the nave, turn to the left, open a door, and we are in the ancient cemetery of the monastery. Comparatively few people enter this impressive place, upon whose walls are written

with nails or pen thousands of names of former friars. The earliest I found was dated 1410. The place is in shape an oblong; all four sides are arcaded; at the extreme end there are steps which take up to a higher level and another arcade. It is upon the walls of the higher arcade that so many names appear which might be illuminating to the historian. The place of burial is no longer used as such. It is an ill-kept garden, and better so perhaps, for cypress, fig, pine, and oak trees grow in a wild confusion which adds to the impressive place a sense of what it really is, a place for the dead, little used and much neglected. I have sat there painting for days together, in which period I have seen only two friars using it for contemplation, exercise, or reading. It is a cemetery indeed, a place of dead thoughts. And yet the sadness which is so emphatic creates half the poetry of this monastic place. Time was when these arcades were filled with enthusiasts, when scores of friars daily took their exercise, read, and conversed among them. Now the walls only whisper memories. The strange place is out of touch with the new order, and echo seems to resent the sound of the few passing steps which now are heard so rarely within the once receptive cloister. This is indeed a place of the past, haunted by spirits of the departed, and they say of nights these cloisters are peopled by denizens of the shades. I have seen the cemetery on a moonlight night, and I confess a tremor came over me, so much that I put my back against the wall lest some unearthly hand should touch me and be unseen. One would rather see a ghost than feel its touch without seeing it. Sad, neglected, and tragic as the place is, I hope it will never be used for modern ways. It tells its own tale, a tale of things that are dead and can never recur in the same measure of importance. One would not care to see an artificial adaptation of such an old-world place, one so obviously made in another

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mood to that now current. Unless it could serve the purpose it once served, may it be let alone and treated as a relic, just taken care of, that is all, and not permitted to tumble to ruins. We come out into the bright hot piazza and look back a moment at the solemn pile of buildings, thinking of the life that has changed, and we bless the memories of the great men who set their marks on the walls to such noble purpose. We have been living with them awhile, almost to hearing them converse as they worked. What a language it is that speaks without words, which sets so vividly before the most sensitive sense a true vision of the thought, the impulses, emotions, deeply felt and vividly told, of a most engaging period for the arts, for religion, for virile enterprise and stirring manhood and womanhood, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries! We must go back to the fifth century in Athens to find its parallel. And so we bid adieu to Assisi. We will get into the country now, among the vines, fig-trees, and all that makes Italy the pleasantest country in Europe still, for there the life is little changed. We can see the city from afar, take with us the memories it has to tell, and view the hillside and the plain as they are to-day under the same burning life-giving sun, under the same blue vault, under the same gentle breezes and sweet scents, as when Francis journeyed and preached in his tattered habit, always happy, and when the princely painter Cimabue came hither from Florence, and, a little later, when he called the shepherd boy Giotto to come with him to help tell the story of the "Little Flowers" and make the great church ring with the fame of all it tells and all it figures.

CHAPTER V

COUNTRY WALKS AND DRIVES

MANY are the delightful walks, drives, and wanderings to be made within a day's excursion from Assisi. I will tell of some of them. To enjoy them as well as to see the life of the people, late spring, summer, and early autumn are the seasons. In late autumn the weather is uncertain. After the vintage time winter sets in early ; the olive gathering does not take place till November, and then it is apt to be cold and cheerless among the wind-beaten hills. Early spring is extremely cold, much colder than in England, though the air is dryer and lighter, and when a fine day appears it is perfect. English people fear the summer in Italy, why I never can make out. If instead of fearing it they would face it wisely as the Italians do, which means rising at dawn, using the early hours, resting in a cool place indoors or out during the three hours of midday heat, which I personally do not mind, but which I know causes suffering to other temperaments, they would, I believe, enjoy themselves to the full. Italy is essentially a summer country ; the people are alive then ; they thrive ill in the winter. Its beauties are all in evidence, and can only be appreciated when sun is victorious over wind and cold. If the art of Italy is to be understood, its people must be known ; if its history is to be understood, its climate

must be appreciated. People and climate are one, as art and the people are one! Umbria is especially beautiful, her people are delightful, her climate is softer than that of Tuscany, as her people are also. The blue in the atmosphere is more limpid as well as more intense than anywhere else within the peninsula, and its peasants are the most discreet, hospitable, and courteous, taking in the whole length and breadth of Italy. But they vary. In each commune are found temperaments which differ from those adjacent. For instance the people of the commune of Spello are different from those of Foligno, of Spoleto, of Assisi, and Perugia. In the plain, and in an area of not more than twenty miles, in such places as Bettona, Cannara, Bevagna, and Monte Falco, to mention a few only, noticeable differences of manner are remarkably evident to the observant and interested traveller. Variations in forms of speech also are to be observed. The Perugians are far more reserved than the Assisans, nor are they so kindly in manner. The people of Spello would seem to be the sons and daughters of a wilder race; the women are singularly beautiful, they are dark, sometimes almost Saracen-like, they are attractive and, I am told, dangerous! The women of Assisi are not beautiful as a rule. Spello and its neighbourhood have not been regarded with favour always; indeed only a little time back foreigners were warned not to wander about alone in the evening, especially round about the Roman remains. That is hearsay and may or may not be true, but there is usually some foundation for such hearsay. Many is the time I have walked or driven thither from Assisi day and night without a hint of difficulty or danger, and a delightful walk or drive it is, with delightful things to enjoy at the end of it. Those who are in search of the picturesque should find their way to Spello upon an early Sunday morning and make their way slowly from Assisi past Sta. Chiara out of the

Porta Nuova into the long white road which descends between olive fields. The road takes a circuitous route downhill till it meets the ancient Roman road which runs along the plain at the extreme foot of the mountain range. Going this way one passes charmingly situated little farms, also one is reminded of ancient Rome by remains of walls and of tombs, and other bits of antiquity are constantly turning up. Two churches, now shut up, are of interest. Keys to visit them can be obtained near at hand. They are near together upon the left of the road before the Roman amphitheatre is reached. I have not been inside them, but I gather from their design that they belong to the eleventh century, perhaps earlier. It is a Sunday morning. As we approach Spello we pass high Roman walls; suddenly turning an abrupt angle we are in the piazza of the Porta Veneris, still so called. It is full of people, of *contadini*, folk who have walked, ridden, or driven, from the plain to hear mass, for Spello is practically empty during week-days, because the population is mostly composed of workers in the fields, vineyards, and olive grounds, who leave the city in early hours and return to it late in the evening. Really as one enters the city one feels in "Colonia Julia Hispellum." Through the gate of Venus and immediately passing a little street named after Diana, the Roman name does not cause surprise as one mingles in the crowd which collects along the narrow steep street, a crowd in which many a face is so ancient in character, so far removed from modern times in type, that the imagination is forced by reality to accept this modern vision as an antique reality come again to life. We are with the ancient inhabitants of Umbria, in the presence of the blood of the original Italic race, touched here and there and crossed by Lombard blood, and perchance also that of the Saracen mercenaries of Frederick II. Why I say the type reminds one

of the Saracen is because in more than one instance I have recalled in Spello the half-Moorish women, so lovely and attractive, in the Island of Capri, who we know have Saracenic blood as well as Greek and Spanish, and in some cases English also. Upon this Sunday morning I wandered up to the top of the town in curiosity and past the collegiate church of Sta. M. Maggiore, forgetting the hour. Upon returning down the hill I found the street deserted. The crowd had emptied itself into the churches for mass. Presently I was in the church. What is this strange and wonderful vision of spring flowers scattered and in masses up the nave, through the aisles, up even to the gates of the altar, some in shade, some in direct sun's rays? For an instant I wondered if I were demented, in a dream, in Paradise or where! Like that of many strange things, the cause of this floral effect was a very simple one. It is the habit of the *contadina* to adorn her head every Sunday with a cleanly-washed but not new handkerchief which has faded into an exquisite tint, so that no inharmonious notes are struck within a perfectly harmonious key. All I saw, then, was a mass of coloured handkerchiefs, than which in effect no garden of fresh flowers could have been more beautiful. And in the special surroundings of gilt objects, dark chapels, flashing beams of sunlight, these silken head-dresses appeared priceless as jewelled crowns, and I was reminded of the fair colours in pictures by Fra Angelico, those colours of heaven that he knew, of all painters, best how to make. Under these crowns of silk there came to be seen the sweetest faces, as well as some of a dangerous beauty to generate a kind of dread as well as attraction to it, as of some lynx or other wild animal. And I counted twelve girls' faces, during the little period of the duration of the mass, of exceeding and wondrous strange beauty and loveliness. It was good to be a foreigner for a space, for all eyes were

turned to me as to some strange animal, which I was to them; hence I could see the mischievous or devouring eyes of these survivors of an ancient aristocracy, perhaps older than Roman, perhaps indigenous; and I felt deeply attracted by this transportation into an uncanny unrelated circle which made time seem as nothing, and space between the ages only as between to-day and to-morrow. And I did not wonder at the power which race has in the history of the world; and how completely ineffectual all effort is to extinguish its influence and endurance or even level it down to connivance with fashions or civilizations, which are, after all, only as bubbles upon the surface of a huge river which is always flowing from its source to the sea, little changing its course, and never changing the character of its flood. Mass over, the beautiful girls and women lingered gossiping in the piazza, and not without some kind of coquetry. They flitted and hovered about. They knew instinctively that they were admired, and I would have talked with them, and wished to do so, but it would have been bad manners and resented, and perhaps would have been dangerous, for the girls with whom I would have spoken might have lost caste. Relationship between men and women must be very guarded in these more or less out-of-the-way places. It is not that women dislike polite intercourse with men, but they resent gossip, which immediately springs up upon the least occasion. A girl may lose character swiftly through the jealousy or animosity of elder women, who are not apt to be kind to the younger. The somewhat oriental separation of the sexes is very marked in many parts of Italy. Rarely does one see a man and woman walking together (never indeed unless they are married); girls go in twos and threes, boys and men in groups. These groups may intermingle, but individuals of them may not mix excepting very cautiously, lest

jealousy or gossip should at once breed ill feeling and perhaps endanger life. This rule of caution applies to towns, but much less to villages, and practically not at all to the field folk, with whom a stranger, if he knows the language, can converse with charming ease and grace so long as he is respectful. But perhaps more on this interesting subject ere long and in another environment. Spello is not a place to stay in, but to visit. There is no inn to be found fit for the ordinarily fastidious traveller, but it is a mighty interesting little city to visit, even upon many occasions, and the walks at the back of the town are superb. From the highest point of Spello the whole plain of the Topino is visible from Foligno to Perugia. The Tiber is seen winding its solemn course towards Rome to flow into the sea at Ostia; numerous, almost numberless, villages and towns can be traced out with the aid of a map from this ancient seat of imperial renown. To return to the city and to such art as it possesses. I know that the frescoes by Pinturicchio of the Annunciation, the Nativity, and Christ disputing with the Doctors, are famous and have been highly praised. They seem cold and scholastic to me, and after his "capo d'opere" in the Camera Borgia in Rome and the library of the Duomo in Siena, they appear black in colour and somewhat scholastic in design. That there are beautiful passages in these works is obvious, and that they contain very interesting portraiture is indisputable; but granted they possess qualities, they are the very qualities which render the work of Masaccio sometimes more prosaic than poetic, and, getting within touch of the academic, they are dull. I cannot place these three pictures upon an equality of merit with Pinturicchio's pictures of the life and death of St. Bernardino da Siena in the church of the Ara Coeli in Rome. But while Pinturicchio in Spello moves me but little, Perugino does, and in the same church, where is his little fresco of the

Pietâ. It has imagination, pathos, and nearly every beauty so satisfying in the primitive painters, not so evident, however, as soon as self-conscious art invaded the territory of traditional design, plus a kind of peasant-like belief in what was related, and what the motive meant to the painter. Being direct and entirely spontaneous, the art is vigorous, if unscientific, and full of heart and noble emotion. It is, I think, seldom that Perugino touched so high a note of poetry as in this Spello Pietâ, and perhaps never, if we except the big fresco at Panicale near Thrasimene, did he make such delightful fair colour. It appears that Perugino executed this and the Panicale fresco with unusual celerity. There seems to be no tempera retouching, hence the fresco colour remains in its pristine purity and transparency, so rare a quality to be found in later art. The student of fresco painting could not do better than minutely study this exquisite little masterpiece, to my thinking the one picture in Spello which rises into the noble decorative region of the art of Cimabue and Giotto in Assisi, though perhaps it does not reach the level of virile epic which Puccio Capanna attained in "The Deposition" in the lower church, of which I have written in a previous chapter.

The road leading from Spello to Foligno is uninteresting save for the spurs of the hills which rise more or less abruptly from the plain, where vegetation is very rich, where vines are especially prolific, and numerous olive fields are productive of especially fine fruit. There is much that is interesting for the traveller in Foligno, the ancient Fulginium. But I have not space at my disposal even to begin to notice its various objects of interest save one, "The Church of Sta. Maria infra Portas" which evidently was originally a pagan temple, and the churches of St. Salvatore and St. Giacomo. Neither of these three churches should be missed by the student of architecture. Injured though

they have been by vandals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, enough remains of very early work to render them of the highest interest to the architect and antiquary. From Foligno the Timia is crossed to reach Bevagna, the ancient Mevania. It is a strange place, and the inhabitants are strange. The city stands upon a slight eminence overlooking marsh land where was once a lake. The land is cut up in dykes, many of them dating back to Roman times, when, notwithstanding its unhealthy feverish climate, Bevagna was one of the important cities of Umbria. Now there remain its mediæval walls, some reminiscences of Roman times, a mosaic pavement of some interest, a Palazzo Communale of the fourteenth century, very noble in design, and an ancient church opposite, which has been a most superb piece of eleventh-century architecture, it may be even earlier. Indeed I would not be surprised if it had been, in the later Empire, the Basilica of the city; for, notwithstanding the terrible sham-classic casing of it, the ground plan and various elevations from it are ancient and of Basilica type. Bevagna is visited by few people. It is out of the way, and is not much of a place for the ordinary tourist, who would probably see little in it to note but dilapidation; but for the archæologist and architect there is much to reward a visit. The name of the church which I have mentioned I cannot find in my note-book, alas! It is impossible, however, to miss it, as there are only two churches of any importance in Bevagna. I believe that if the sham-classic Palladian rubbish, which is only of plaster, were knocked away, a superb and very early building would be disclosed, and probably all decorated in fresco; and more than that, I believe the foundation will be found to be Roman. It would be a costly enterprise, but not by any means an impossible one to achieve, an enterprise that none but confirmed pedants should object to. This neighbourhood is full of what

have been highly interesting early churches, ruined by the fashion of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in the latter, when taste was about at its lowest ebb in Italy and elsewhere. What was once a glorious cathedral, the Duomo of Spoleto, was modernized by one of the Barbarini family in 1644. Here again I suspect that much, if not all, of the original church remains under the mechanical sham-classic casing. An entirely satisfactory experiment of elimination of superfluous architecture has been tried in the Church of Sta. Maria infra Portas, which I have mentioned, where the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century shams have been cleared away by the energy and excellent judgment of a discreet and learned priest, and thus have become revealed early wall-paintings and the original structure of a church of which portions are said to date from the first century. Be this so or not, there can be no doubt that the greater part of the revealed structure is of ninth- or tenth-century work. We see the cathedral of Spoleto not one little bit as it was, save for the west front, when Fra Filippo Lippi executed the superb frescoes of the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Death and Coronation of the Virgin. These, in some respects the finest works of the master, are now out of harmony with the cold, calculated, unspeakably dull architecture of a dead period. They speak in another language; they tell of a far purer period of taste; they exhibit invention, enthusiasm, freshness of thought, and splendour of colour, in exact contradiction to the chill which the heartless design of the seventeenth century produces. Thinking he was doing again what Rome had done before in the Forum, which Rome achieved up to a standard of taste of an inartistic people, the sham classic architect deceived himself. He relied upon measurement; he copied with terrible exactness. Mimicry in the hands of a stereotyped scientific architect became a horror of propriety which

drove out every semblance of vitality and left a corpse. And yet, and yet, this same sham classic is still accepted as art, even now when we ought to have learned that art and scholarship are different things, and when such noble forms of architecture are before us at every turn in Italy, France, and England, if precedents are necessary. If we cannot invent a style, why copy one which was dead when it was first started? Why make a copy of a copy? It's a long way to go to arrive at nothing. I am tempted, whenever I enter one of those depressing classic churches, to play the part of a suffragist, to take an axe and begin to hack away the impudent stucco. I have, indeed, often tapped the superimposed surface and found it to be hollow behind, and I have picked off big bits of stucco an inch in thickness, and have seen underneath it either the beautiful red limestone, "ammonitico rosso," so plentiful in the Apennines, or traces of the *intonaco* of an ancient fresco retaining the old colour still bright, probably being part of some work of the twelfth, thirteenth, or fourteenth century. This is a long digression, but what I said and the opinion I have expressed, which I know will not be accepted by many modern followers of fashion, proceeds from a strong conviction, which those who are good enough to read this little book will notice to have been stated in various ways, namely, that the real classic survived long after the fifth century, when Christianity took command as a religion, and that it was still vital in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; that sham classic was an interloper which brought Rome, and not Greece, into the modern Renaissance, a movement which, to my mind, was rather fatal than not to consecutive progress, and in reality representing a divergence rather than a sequence. Forgive me, then, and let us go back to Bevagna. It had been thought probable that the Umbrian plain was in prehistoric times a lake, which would account for the bog, for

it is that, upon which the foundations of Bevagna stand; hence the chief industry comes from the growth and use of rushes, which flourish luxuriantly in all the drain dykes. Hence it is by basket-making that a large proportion of the people live—not thrive, for they are very poor. The damp, rising in winter and forming serious fogs, renders the air poisonous, hence there is much malaria and marsh fever. The people are pale, the children do not look healthy, and there is an air of distress in the place; and this is a pity, for the country about is very beautiful and fertile of its kind, while the oxen bred in the neighbourhood are famous for their size and beauty. I said the natives are strange. They are so on account of their locality, which is exceptional in Umbria. They might belong to a different climate from that of Spello, Foligno, Spoleto, and Assisi, to which they are near and yet far off. Perhaps the people have kept much to themselves, have mixed little with their neighbours, hence an extreme reserve and almost moroseness have formed a habit. It is evident they are the reverse of sociable. It is, I think, an interesting fact, that towns upon the spurs of a great range of mountains appear to breed a different kind of folk from those coming from the plain, and moreover the people who are bred in a morass seem to partake of the soil—their character is dull, inelastic, and the reverse of buoyant. This is most noticeable in the Maremma country, in the region of the Paludi, about Ravenna and the low-lying districts between Pisa and the sea. Presently we leave Bevagna and turn our horses towards Monte Falco—only three miles distant, but what a contrast the two places and the peoples form! We go up and up from the plain, leaving behind us mist and miasma, passing through country of great fertility and rich beauty; we are reminded of our own Devonshire. We are now overlooking the narrowest

part of the great Umbrian plain, and where streams flow pretty freely from the mountain slopes. Monte Falco is perched upon a high hill which rises more or less abruptly from the plain. It can be seen distinctly from Assisi, from whence it is some seventeen miles, and from the highest part of the little city there is a range of view so spacious, so characteristic and diverse, that I hardly know of its superior. The view takes in Terni, Narni, Spoleto, Foligno, Assisi, and Perugia, only to mention the bigger cities which are contained within this magnificent panorama. The fantastic forms of the Apennines, taking every shape from sharp dentils to soft round slopes, present a variety of outline so enchanting and refined that the draughtsman would have to follow their shapes and delineate them with a hard lead pencil, so engagingly precise and finished are the forms which compose those mighty Italian hills, so distinguished also are they ; for while infinite variety charms the imagination, a grand breadth of design governs every detail and brings every element of it into epic discipline. I have been at Monte Falco upon several occasions, but one day stands out among the rest as *facile princeps*—one Sunday in 1912, in companionship with my friend, Padre Leone. We started at an early hour upon an August morning, driving in a little carriage with a slow but surefooted cob to draw it. I always make a compact that the horse I engage shall have slow paces ; he must be more ruminating than active. If there is one thing I hate more than another, it is to be taken swiftly through beautiful country. It seems to me to partake of a kind of insolence to hurry through and past scenery which should be absorbed into the mind, which the eye should dwell long upon and slowly take in, and indeed must do so if the impression is to affect the mind with permanency and be recoverable. So all was right ; my little horse

went slowly, his driver was a charming wag who conversed in low tones with his steed quite constantly and evidently upon the most intimate terms; and we, hypnotized by the beauty and the delicious slowness of procedure, became quite rapt in nature, to whom we listened, whom we watched, and from whom we received much more than from each other's talk. One cannot read the book of nature and talk as well, or rather if one does, nature denies much of herself: she will have all or she will give little, perhaps nothing. Monte Falco is one of those mysterious places which seem to recede as they are approached; one seems to be constantly nearing it and losing it. The road to it as soon as the plain is passed is so circuitous in fashion that the city appears first on the left and then on the right; then it disappears to crop up again unexpectedly. It seems to be enchanted, to evade the traveller, and even upon near approach it still remains an enigma. We pass it over and over again before we enter the city; and then the inn is outside the gates, and a very nice little hostel it is, where one could pass weeks in comfort. It is quite clean and boasts a charming old lady as its hostess who is an admirable cook. The main object of our visit was to see the frescoes of the life of St. Francis by Benozzo Gozzoli, signed by him and dated 1452. Born in 1424, Benozzo was twenty-four when he came to execute these charming works, which Vasari does not mention, but of whose authenticity there can be no doubt. They have been retouched in places, perhaps too many, but there remains quite enough of the original work to prove the fine quality of the design, colour, and workmanship. If these youthful essays are not to be compared with the more mature work of Benozzo, they are highly entertaining. It is to the capitular Church of San Gimignano we must turn for his mature work, and to the Church of St. Agostino in the same city, where Benozzo painted

a series of frescoes representing the life of St. Augustine, an elaborate and exquisite continuity of design also not mentioned by Vasari. Extreme fairness of colour and variety of pale tints at once arrest attention. The effect produced is a shadowless one, of reflected light and luminosity. As at San Gimignano so here at Monte Falco, Benozzo has chosen a very high key of colour, thus the appearance of light throughout the whole design is vivid and strong without loss of refinement. As decoration I think these frescoes are entirely successful; they have great charm and *naïveté* of design, and display much fancy. Even if one is inclined to deny Benozzo the highest qualities as a poetic painter, we can admit as a decorative painter he is in the front rank. As a poet he cannot take rank with Giunta da Pisa, Cimabue, or Giotto. Even his highest accomplishment, his frescoes in the Campo Santo of Pisa, does not rank with "The Triumph of Death" by Orgagna, the Dante of painters. Benozzo is essentially a lyric, not an epic painter. His design is always pleasing, always entertaining. It presents the purely sensuous life, not the dramatic, and it does not go deeper than that. In the Church of S. Francesco in Monte Falco is another work by Benozzo painted in the same year, 1452—an altar-piece with Virgin and Saints, which is a remarkable work for so young a man; it shows more depth of feeling than there may be in the St. Francis series, but technically it is inferior. Study of the work of Benozzo would, I think, prove an excellent antidote to much modern work that shows the reverse of technical discipline, but in some instances aims to attain fair and pure colour under a flat and decorative effect, although it is too often so badly drawn and so slovenly in technique that the qualities in quest are so hidden or molested under obvious defects which a little care would have rectified, that they are

rendered negative. Some day I hope to make Monte Falco a centre for outdoor painting. It is a cool place in summer, and, as I have said, an excellent little hostel is at hand. The surrounding country, near and far, is exquisite beyond description. There is every variety of landscape to be found, pastoral, fruitful, arid, and desolate. Every mood of a painter may be satisfied ; he can find solitude in the barren hills, in primitive woods and caves, or companionship with peasants working a fruitful soil, or lose himself in richly-laden lanes of oak, poplar, and chestnut, where wild flowers grow in profusion in an air laden with sweet scents. There is no monotony either in the landscape or in the people. That fact is one of the great charms of Italy, especially of Umbria and Tuscany. Art expresses its environment. Variety is exhilarating, monotony is depressing. It is monotony which kills poetry and suffocates invention. The variety of the little area of Umbria which I am only too lightly indicating, and which does not include, taking it in the square, more than sixty miles, is amazing ; it presents and represents a kingdom. History is present to the mind in every variety of touch with time, in its touch with the most remote and primitive period of art, manners, customs, and pursuits. A primitive and pastoral life runs side by side with new movements and in close conjunction with classical associations, which are purely so, or others which grew to be artificial. We are following the footsteps of Cæsar, of Benedict, of Francis, of the Emperor Frederick ; and we can trace the progress of art from Giunta da Pisa to Filippo Lippi. It is this marvellous symphony of history, of emotion, of variety, and of life, which renders to this little portion of Umbria a series of enchantments which is not elsewhere excelled. Descending by winding road from Monte Falco to the plain again, we are ere long in the little mediæval

town of "Cannara" under the shelter of Monte Veduta del Lago, which name implies that there was a lake, and probably a very important one, giving that title to the mountain. Being in a damp situation, canes grow luxuriously. It may be that the name is derived from "Canna," "Canes." Again we are in a town built upon marsh land and a far damper situation than Bevagna, for it is completely surrounded by dykes forming moats from which ditches have been dug in all directions, partly for irrigation, partly for drainage. Cannara is worth seeing. There is no church and there are no pictures of any special interest there; but the place is very mediæval. It maintains a character quite its own, and one which would not be likely to have been subject to change, seeing the nature of the soil on which it stands and by which it is surrounded, and which prescribed the necessity for stability of buildings and gave rise to the industries and the idiosyncrasies of the population. Still more than at Bevagna the basket-trade is ubiquitous. It has been constant in Cannara from Roman times, through mediæval, and right up to to-day without a break. The land in the districts is very fertile, being constantly irrigated and refreshed. In winter the Topino overflows, and the whole of the low-lying plain is flooded, much as the Delta is in Egypt; indeed it becomes a temporary lake. From Cannara, the ancient town of Bettona can be reached on foot, but it is better to drive there from Assisi, and that I did upon two occasions, much to my enjoyment. Bettona is not mentioned in Murray, but it is well worth a visit of a day or two. The ordinary intelligent traveller will find it picturesque. The artist or antiquarian will find profitable study during several days' sojourn there. Standing on the terrace of Hotel Subasio in Assisi the little town is seen upon the slope of the opposite range of hills and at a considerable altitude. It looks very tempting, as such places always appear. Sometimes, but rarely, one is

not rewarded for the trouble of getting to them. Owing to the climb up from the plain, which is a long though not a very steep one, it is well to employ two horses, and if the excursion is to be made there and back in the same day a very early start from Assisi is necessary, even on the longest summer days. The morning of my first visit to Bettona I shall never forget. Just after sunrise the whole valley under Assisi was shrouded in one sea of white- and rose-coloured mist. There had been rain, the earth was hot, and up and up rose the graceful fringes of opaque but light cloud-mist which nearly met the highest peaks of the opposite mountains. Moving slowly upwards, and attracted by the sun, the vapour opened out in places, gathering together again, alternately exposing and concealing the iris-tinted hills. The palest violet shadows moved with the rose-like mist, rising and falling. Presently here and there windows opened in these soft walls of white vapour. Far down a vision of the plain opened out, to be concealed again presently. Little holes of emerald colour appeared among the white and violet, and white oxen ploughing were just to be distinguished among the vines and alder trees, presently to be concealed again. It seemed to be an eternal shifting scene till the sun gained greater power and attracted the mist by his ardent embraces in rose-coloured flames presently to be absorbed, till at last, as if by magic, the range of mountains became clear, the fields and towns became evident, the shroud which had so beautifully wrapt them in mystery was lifted off, and a blue, the like of which I have never seen before, embraced the great dome of infinity. By this time it was 6 o'clock and one or two serpentine threads of mist still lingered over the valley reluctant to leave, when we made our start to go to Bettona, that Bettona from whence men and women, standing upon the ramparts, saw a golden fire burning over the top

of the forest which sheltered Portiuncula. Thinking the wood was on fire they and the men of Assisi in great haste ran down the slopes to the plain that they might extinguish the flames. The Flames of Divine Love they were which encircled Francis, Chiara, and their companions. The charming story is told in the fifteenth chapter of the *Fioretti.* After so enjoying an early sunrise of alluring beauty, it seemed proper to pause at Sta. Maria degli Angeli upon our way and perchance to stand upon the same spot where Francis and Chiara met to take their sacred meal together under the protection of The Divine Flame of Love. And to make reality still more real, we went to the little garden of roses whose leaves are red with the blood of Francis, so made when he threw himself into the thorns and bled for love of his Master. Driving on, we soon afterwards came to the chapel erected upon the spot where Francis caused a spring to rise out of the earth. Indeed the area of this part of the plain is full of records of the "Little Brothers," changed though much of it is from forest to luxuriant cultivation. Parts of this drive remind one of England's sweetest county, Kent. Fruit-trees abound—plum, apple, cherry, peach, and what England once had, but rarely can boast of now, the vine ; oaks too in profusion, and those smaller species of elm which are to me so much more beautiful than the cabbage-shaped trees so much seen in England, which remind me of picnics and bad pictures of landscape of the eighteenth century ; and the poplar, alder also ; but above all such wild flowers as we never see in England, growing right down to the edge of the road, and hedges weighed down with honeysuckle, and in August too, this profusion of scented vegetation. All these things my fellow-countrymen do not see in Italy because they mostly come here at the wrong season, and run away directly the sun is beginning to do his duty, to warm the

earth, to draw the flowers up from the roots, to ripen fruit, and to give joy, life, and energy to man. These things they miss because they prefer the mostly-grey summer in England, its commercial gloom, its hideous smoke, its groaning factory towns, its indoor life, and above all the depressing atmosphere of gain before all. In these perfect Italian conditions of sun, of a gentle soft breeze, of scents at every step pressed out of the fertile earth, we pass over the sumptuous plain, irrigated with Oriental skill, till we begin to mount a circuitous road bordered with cypress and poplars, and winding among little estates with their flat-roofed houses, *loggie*, and threshing-floors, for the flail is still used in Italy, though one does, alas, sometimes hear the moan of a threshing-machine and note the smoke it makes, the dirt it leaves behind, and the stench of rancid oil, an inevitable adjunct of depressing machinery. As we approach the city, to the left and north of us is the cemetery standing upon the crown of a hill among hills, a perfect nest of cypress and young stone-pines, whose golden green glittering in the sunshine is giving value to the violet shadows of rocky ground from which every variety of shrub grows in almost self-conscious rapture, so authoritative is the growth, so sparkling and palpitating the foliage under the midday light. That midday silver and diamond glitter, studded with turquoise and emerald shade, has a sovereign fascination for me, it quickens the imagination, it looks so joyous and fruitful. That hour when the sun is almost vertical above the earth, when shadow clings round the stems of trees and does not wander away from the light, when local colour is almost obliterated under the dominion of light; the clear serene blue of the sky is like a great wall, the most solid of all the atoms of nature then, but quivering in sensuous delight so that solid buildings seem to be converted into a semi-transparent substance as if made of a fair and diaphanous

material. Almost ghostly they become. They seem to be within the consuming power of light. This hour of the day has its own secrets; it is perplexing; it reveals the mystery of light as midnight does the mystery of darkness — both are poetical extremes. Neither the one nor the other has yet been perfectly painted—happy indeed the man who finds a way to convey that solemn, tremulous, searching frenzy of the sun at midday "when the gods sleep." There is always a hush, a kind of initial silence, in the midday. It was like this when I wandered round the little city, which can be circumambulated in half an hour. Greetings were pleasant in the little piazza. It was a Sunday, and the people were all in from the country. A picturesque crowd of them was collected, and we foreigners were an object of curious concern, for few are seen in this out-of-the-way little place, which has no attractions for the trotter. One goes to the "general shop" in such places as this for news of hostel or what not. Presently we were taken down a narrow street of fourteenth-century houses to emerge into a sweet little shaded garden full of amorous stocks and flaming carnations. A flight of steps took us up to a large room, the dining-hall of the hostel, at present entirely filled with a French family, with whom we made friends at once over an excellent dinner and, above all, *superb wine.* One may stay in an English inn a week and get to know nobody, so reserved, shy, sometimes stupid, are the English apt to be. In genial Italy the blessed sun warms the coldest nature, and gives a little temporary spring away from gloomy self-concentration even to an approach to altruistic gaiety. We were Italians and French, I the only heavy Saxon, and yet, dull Saxon though I know I am, so many years of Italy have unstarched the buckram of my epidermis, and perhaps I can open out, perhaps receive, and perhaps give a little, in the sun-lit land

and among the sun-begotten folk, for gaiety is catching even to the Anglo-Saxon. It was a very merry table there, the food excellent, and, as I have said, the *wine superb.* But of it beware !—it is a liar—it says, "I am mild !" The merry circle had presently to break up, for we *forestieri* had to see Bettona. It is a long-shaped town, pointed and fortified towards Perugia, standing upon a spur of the Apennines. Roman remains are there ; many inscriptions have come to light, tablets of them being often found in neighbouring fields, but probably the site is older than Rome. It must have been an Umbrian stronghold perhaps thousands of years ago. It protects from aggressive Perugia the first upstanding land upon the south side of the great plain. It overstands the road to Rome. There are early walls of rude masonry, possibly Cyclopean, on which Roman later work has been added, and mediæval upon that. The walk round the walls, or rather outside them, is a matter of less than an hour, so small and compact is this snug little city. Gardens, vineyards, olive-groves, and little home-farms are close up and about the walls, being built upon them, and now form parts of dwellings with little openings converted into *loggie*, where women sit and spin. Tiny windows have been knocked in the old Roman and mediæval walls, from whence many a pretty girl or inquisitive crone may be seen, probably in their curiosity making up talk as to who these strange people are, and why they come, and one would like to tell them why, yet I question if the majority would quite understand, for these mountain-dwelling people in Umbria do not move about much or understand the pleasures of travel, nor do they see in their own places aught that is strange—they are just desirable as their homes, that is all. And Bettona is not a tourist's place ; there is little to see in the way of "sights." But for

the antiquarian and painter there is much; many inscriptions to read, and though the little city has suffered misfortunes from sieges and fire, there are old bits about it which may tell many an historic tale of war in the fierce Middle Ages. And for the artist Bettona is full of suggestions, and its environments are as beautiful as any I know in Italy—deep dells of solemn shade and most richly responsive land. Speedy diversity in the formation of the land induces unexpected variation to the forms of hills and valleys. The hills are studded with smaller ones, steep descents and sudden rises promote quick changes of aspect, and novelties of landscape quaint and lovely rapidly occur. There are chestnut woods in abundance, and every kind of tree grows luxuriantly out of an alluvial soil. The country here about is not thickly populated, but the land is all in work. Singularly picturesque farmhouses abound which, even if of modern construction, preserve the ancient lines of design nearly related to real classic. Always there is a tower, a place of defence, always long open *loggie*, and big barns abound for storage of grain, faggots, barrels, and every picturesque article, and hand, not machine farming provides a memento of ancient, probably prehistoric, agriculture. And here at Bettona I have seen no signs of the invasion of modern machinery to bring poverty and squalor, and for this Heaven be thanked! Alas, vexatious machinery is creeping into even the by-ways of the many classic places in Umbria. The smoke from factories at Spoleto lies often like an evil serpent across the divine plain, but here at Bettona no signs are as yet evident of barbarian invasion from Manchester, Genoa, or Germany. Indeed the eye may wander for miles over these delectable hills and valleys and see no reminder of pompous hideousness and degraded poverty, the offspring of great cities and wealth-greed. It is a restful land still, and so lovely, so primitive, so chaste. The kind of poverty which has dignity is here,

without squalor which accompanies civilization as criminals accompany armies. For whereas great cities and commerce produce squalor, and the environment of railways is always forbidding and repulsive, so a manufacturing town is made up of dust-heaps, smoke, pale faces, and poor pale hearts. Not their fault, poor things, but because everything around and about them is false and artificial and utterly foreign to man's original destiny. So may it be long before the demon of unrest, under the plea of progress, invades gardens, vineyards, forests, and the vast areas of fruit growing in Italy. Many greedy companies wish to make desolate the land, and many noble people defeat them, refusing to be made pale slaves, to lose their spirit of independence under the most deadly curse of the modern world, the cold, heartless pulse of remorseless machinery. One cannot help these thoughts or resist comparisons in such a paradise, and wishes that once beautiful rural England could be born again, but it will not yet. The monster has killed much of it. Perhaps such of us who mourn the destruction of the country, the growth of hideous towns with their compelling death, vice, and soul-killing, in our own land may be forgiven for wishing that Italy may find means to nourish herself without recourse to the dominion of factories and all the evils that follow their track and surround them as an evil miasma. We may hope that the Italian people will use their luminous intelligence, not to destroy whole tracts of country for the provision of cheap luxury, but to create a modern civilization upon the lines of the old, and without destruction, one which shall build up, not destroy, add, not take away, and in the highest sense enrich and not impoverish a people whose past is the admiration of the whole world.[1] Italy after Greece has been the great

[1] The people who are the real progenitors of culture, which "Kultur" has set out to destroy, in the hands of a machine-made insolence.

AN UMBRIAN AFTERNOON

(*By permission of the Rt. Hon. Sir Walter Phillimore, Bart.*)

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civilizing power. Germany is now given over to barbarism and has shown that her culture is only a veneer to conceal a rotten core. Italy has given to western Europe pretty much all it knows about art, and in science she was a pioneer, and if she does not stand as high as she did in the years of her great genius, Italy is still a land of promise to which we may look for a solution of many a pregnant problem. For her people have not only genius, they have much practical good sense, and they are not yet emasculated by inordinate ideas of liberty under the title of emancipation from labour. More concentrated did so great a desire become as, after seeing the sunset behind Monte Cucco, in the opening twilight of this August night we reluctantly bid good-bye and God-speed to the little city and happy oasis of pastoral and agricultural labour, to wind our slow way in the deepening darkness of covered lanes and umbrageous banks to Assisi. Those wondrous August nights in Umbria! And this one, after the mist of the early morning and the full generous sun of the whole day, was peculiarly lovely and clear. So silent too, for never a leaf jostled its neighbour in the warm still air. Like miniature lamps of diamonds set in gold, fireflies made the air radiant, giving of their little bodies such light that I was able to read as crowds of them hovered round. Then to the ear there came the croaking of frogs as we passed over marsh or pond land, mingling with the chirp of the cicada, so cheerful, crisp, and merry a sound it is. And another and still more nearly touching sound, night songs, the *stornelli* of the peasants, who are ardently but gaily at work getting in the rich crops of maize to the sound of their songs, their pipes and flutes, and, may be when it is dark, by the light of torches or covered lanterns. And above all, spread out as a great tent better than any dome of man's making, the great blue firmament, heavily studded with

stars and so spangled with these "lamps of heaven," as the Arabs call them, that it seemed they might drop at any instant and mingle with the fireflies. To hear the *contadini* sing from afar is more delightful to the ear than close. It is a strange music that they make, unwritable music, the tones are so merged, almost undistinguishable are they. It is not exactly music, it is a sound of which one knows that it was invented and was a language in primitive times, and that it comes from the hearts of the makers, that it breathes always of love, that it is traditional and yet spontaneous, and exactly suits the landscape day or night. So in the very womb of nature these strange sound songs seem to have lain. As slowly as beast could move, we were taken through lanes heavy with the scent of honeysuckle and herbs, narrow too, for we brushed against vines and felt the touch of the almost-ripe grape upon our cheeks, and to the sound of the night songs always in the minor key, till passing out into the more open plain the singing became fainter ; but looking back we still saw the moving flicker of the torches and lanterns till they gave out in the distance and the sound of song ceased. Distance has removed the human element. Its echo becomes fainter, till it has died in the darkness. Far into midnight, indeed in the early hours of the morning, almost within touch of dawn, we passed the leper hospital, and crept slowly up the road under the great shadow of the church and monastery, and so into the quite silent city. One look out of the window, one more passionate glance over the rich night-enclosed plain, and memory was the harvest of that day. These eastern wanderings from Assisi are really so easily made, one wonders why visitors fail to find means to make them. So are those easy of access to the west along the lower slopes of the hills—not so much in the plain, for the towns at this end are not interesting, Bastia and Petrignano for instance.

But the villages upon the slopes, which are in reality twelfth- and thirteenth-century castles, are intensely delightful and quite easy to reach on foot or in carriage, though very few visitors ever go to them, and they miss much. They are Sterpeto, Tordibetto, Palazzo, Rocca S. Angelo, San Gregorio, Castel d'Arno, Ripa, and Civitella. All of these, saving Ripa and Civitella, are in the commune of Assisi. Many are the days I have spent in these delicious places, which are in a totally different character of country from that of the towns and villages upon the eastern side, some of which we have already seen. Directly the river is passed, directly M. Subasio ceases to dominate, and the Rocca of Assisi to threaten invaders, the country becomes pastoral. That fortress remains hidden as we turn towards the lower eastern ranges of hills. The stern almost rigorous nature of the scenery immediately behind Assisi gives way to a soft beauty. It is very umbrageous, very fertile, the plain being well watered by the Tiber. We leave stones and rocks behind us; we part with the masculine country to meet the feminine; less grand, less impressive it is, being more engaging than resolute, more caressing than forbidding. And this indication is strange, because every place just now mentioned has been a fortress of great importance for the protection of the commune of Assisi. Each and all of them has seen war and bloodshed; each in its turn has been attacked by Perugia, which is immediately opposite and not more than twelve miles away over the plain to the south-west. They all were castles or, as the Italians call such places of defence, *rocce*, because for the most part they have been planted upon places of vantage, mostly upon prominent rocks difficult to scale and easy to defend. These *rocce* or castles defended the approach from the west to Assisi, and commanded the approach to the capital from the plain. For the part these

ancient fortresses have played in the history of Assisi, I recommend the study of Cristofani's *Storia d'Assisi.* In this admirable book will be found all that is known of their doings and the conspicuous part the Counts of Fiume, Favorini dei Scifi, and other notable knights played in the story of that city in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. Upon the discovery and use of gunpowder, as places for defence these *rocce* or castles became practically useless, though there are signs that small cannon were placed and perhaps used in the fifteenth century, but there are only a few indications of them. It may be gathered, then, that after the early part of the fifteenth century, as fortresses they were no longer employed ; whether or no they were retained as palaces of the nobility is another matter, probably not. And so, retaining the outside walls and the entrance-gate, and in some cases the keep, they have been converted into little townships which have gradually grown up within them, containing a hundred or a hundred and fifty people. Each is a separate parish, each retains its parish priest, its little church, and here proceeds to-day in an unbroken sequence a form of the life of the Middle Ages in a manner highly picturesque and remarkable. These townships for the most part remain in the possession of families who held them in the thirteenth century and earlier, families who are rightly proud of their ancient titles and the part their ancestors played in preserving the liberty of Assisi and its territory from being absorbed by the arbitrary and powerful republic of Perugia. The part of the country where these fortified places are is the most Arcadian in the whole environment of Assisi. I know no part of Italy more Virgilian than this is in sentiment, where country life is as it was, and where one is reminded more keenly of the very slight demarcation which exists between pagan and Catholic customs, than here in this quite small area, so highly but not too formally

cultivated. The peasants retain many an old custom of tribute to the gods. Dedication of small portions of every seed which is to be sown is made to the Virgin protectress of the soil, not Ceres now, but Mary. These are sewn up in little bags called *cenciarelli*, which means "little rags," and these, together with bottles of oil and wine, are every year placed in a shrine by the roadside to invoke the aid and insure the blessing of "La Madonna dei Cenciarelli," of "Our Lady of the Little Rags." The dedication of these gifts as prayers and conciliation to the Virgin Mary is accompanied by a solemn service every spring or autumn, time of sowing, of reaping, of the period of the new wine and fresh crushed oil. No one passes such sacred shrines as these are in the eyes of the peasantry without making a sign of the cross, and saying one Ave Maria. Again, and with other intentions, shrines by the roadside, where they have stood for centuries, are in evidence in which (behind wire gratings or fixed into them) different herbs used as cures for maladies have been religiously placed. When the *contadini* are ill (or to protect them from illness) a medicinal herb is presented to the Virgin Mary as a peace-offering, to call her attention to the sick peasant, that she may bless the herb and so a cure may be effective and sure. The *contadini* name their pet pigs, lambs, sheep, or goats. These animals are called by the names of saints, sometimes of gods and goddesses—Francesco, Benedetto, Pietro, and Maria. Many a pet lamb and little pig which is to come under the butcher's knife is named Checco, the short for Francis. I have known Venere, Bacco, and Apollo as names given to pet animals. Such titles as these, being of influential association, are supposed to bring good luck to the family, so close are the saints and the gods to the atmosphere and daily life of these simple folk. The anthropomorphic imagination is still strong as in the days of Virgil,

so much of ancient pagan association has survived. I have mentioned these surviving details of a kind of pantheism, for we are in the presence of them in this corner of mediæval, pagan, modern Umbria, and just in this bit of it where agricultural life and Hesiodic reminiscences art prominent they are much in evidence, for those who take the trouble to find them out. You will see it as you go, hear it as they talk, that the ancient spirit of pre-Christian times is a living force, not consciously a bit, but traditionally and nationally, in Umbria to-day as it was when Virgil wrote his *Bucolics* and Propertius wrote of Cynthia. Just near to the turn of the road which leads to Petrignano, as I have said, a place little worth a visit save upon the day of a Fair, is a narrow lane; before you come to it and over the field is seen a low-lying building like a decapitated fortress up on the top of a hill. It is tempting to go up the steep road to it, it looks so snug, so old-world, and withal it shows such a simple and noble silhouette against the sky, with two slender pine-trees as sentinels. It is a bit of a pull-up to get there. This is Sterpeto, an ancient fortress from whence the soldier forebears of Sta. Chiara came—noble and brave knights were her kinsmen, but arrogant regarding family ties of responsibility. There is the deep low gateway, the strong, once sightless, walls, now perforated here and there to let in light to some dark chamber. There is the great piazza outside the castle where the soldiers and retainers of the Counts did their drill, collected for defence, and where they watched the forces of the Perugians gathering in the valley. There is the double gateway, the portcullis, the opening above to pour down molten metal or what not upon invaders. Then the scene suddenly changes from castle to little town of tiny narrow streets rudely paved, of passages covered in with huge wooden beams, of high-built houses reached by

steep well-trodden stairs, where from wooden *loggie* the distant country is ranged tier upon tier to the far-off mountains, where the vine grows to give shade, where are pots of carnations crimson and white, and the golden climbing nasturtium in reckless energy is making its way, clasping tenaciously with its delicate tendrils as it proceeds up and down wherever it likes, unheeded and unchecked; and through or up between walls and passages, splashes of deep blue sky accentuate the grim almost blood colour of the old stone, the blackened beams, and dark corners where the sun never reaches. And so narrow are the streets that a man can touch both walls at once with either hand. There are no goodly knights in armour or fair ladies in brocades of graceful colour. This has changed. But there are fine fellows who work in the fields all day upon very simple fare, big and strong women too who help, and doubtless there is as much love here in this transformed little township as there was seven hundred years ago when Chiara was here and Francis came through the gates from Assisi upon one of his missions. Of lovely children there are plenty in this kind of rabbit-warren of houses, who peep round corners, come out of them, and rush away on account of some self-created terror, like young hinds for swiftness and kittens for coquetry. I gave a feast of wine here one afternoon, wine brought from Assisi. Bottle after bottle went round when the priest appeared, who took his share of the cup of Dionysus with proper enthusiasm, as fits a priest in a grape-laden land, and the children watched. They too had their little share of confections brought from a sweet-shop opposite the Temple of Minerva. While I drew there was much talk and much speculation as to where I came from, and I had to tell them of England and of our old castles there, and of the great Italians who came to us and taught us many things in olden days; and I think they wondered a little at the history, which seemed a

little like their own in the times of the Barons. "Then you are Christians, you other people (*Siete già Cristiani, voi altri*), and worship Christ, which does not so much matter if you trust Maria. She takes all our wants to Christ, for she is our Mother, and He is her Son, and the Son listens to the voice of the Mother." So spoke an old woman to me. And though there are no brocades or precious metals in this now primitive place, and there *is* poverty, there is no squalor. The *contadini* are content; they work hard upon food which would not nourish an English peasant; their sun nourishes them; the clear clean air they breathe stiffens their nerves, and the natural lives they live render them hale and exempt from morbidity. Pity in any measure would be ill bestowed, save perhaps in winter when the wind blows keen in this highland, and wood for burning is scarce just here at Sterpeto. The priest who ministers to this little township of one hundred folk is an interesting man, and by no means lacking in native intelligence, but without much book-learning. We talked of the celibacy of the clergy, a discussed subject just now in Italy. I argued against it, and spoke of the priest's wife as being a possible mother to the parish. "No," he said, "that would never do here; she would be the great gossip; she would do harm; she would make mischief. The people would not look up to her as the wife of a priest; they would despise her. We must not marry; all our energies and all our love must be given to the flock for Christ's sake; love of wife, love of her children, must not come into our lives. All the children are our children; the men and women are our brothers and sisters. We must concentrate as well as expand our love towards them; they are given into our charge. We must be ready at the call of life, at the call of death, to be near to them day or night, because, Signorino mio, dying or living I must be with them. My flock has been given into my charge by my

AN UMBRIAN THRESHING-FLOOR NEAR ROCCA SANT' ANGELO

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Master, and I must follow in His steps and in those of the blessed Francis." Many times I went to Sterpeto upon my way onwards to Rocca S. Angelo and San Gregorio, and sometimes the priest came with me and we held pleasant talk together. I often felt I was talking to an old pagan of the time of Marcus Aurelius. Oh, how anthropomorphic they are, priest and people, how classical, what a combination of ideas one meets with at every turn, and of all kinds in this central Italy far from the sea, protected by ranges of steep mountains from mariners who bring tales of other lands! So the people keep their own tales, which go down from generation to generation, having had their embryo in the womb of primitive myths which new adaptations of beliefs have not rendered impotent! I imagine the reason why primitive Italian art is so spontaneous, is so real an expression, so full of intensity of allusion, is that the motive lives in the flesh, has been made human, is under the likeness of man. The idea has been concentrated, not scattered, and worked out in the place of its birth and environment. The gracious spirit which takes flesh in the art of Giotto and Cimabue is reflected in quiet intensity at Rocca S. Angelo, whither I turn my steps along an olive-clad country with the glittering Tiber upon the left winding among pastures, for the land is flat there, but not marshy as at Cannara. And there are many things which arrest the painter and the antiquary in this new quest. Right and left are small holdings which, modern or ancient, are commanded by houses of well-to-do owners of small estates, not only very picturesque but noble in design. They show broad and high towers of fine proportion, finished on the verge by a lace-like pattern in brick, interspaced with many delicate members forming various cornices in different scales. I know of no other work and ornament of quite this peculiar character of design elsewhere.

There is certainly none as far as I have seen upon the eastern side of Assisi, so it perhaps points to some local influence which came in and remained, but did not expand. It seems to partake of oriental influence. Unfortunately some modern would-be clever vandal has lately erected a farm, barn, and other buildings in this locality, which remind one of the worst stucco design and erection, alas! so common and widespread in so often artistically inarticulate England. There is another shameful instance of the same kind in Assisi, an hotel lately erected near the Subasio, which should be promptly pulled down — it is a disgrace to the city, to the mayor, to the corporation, and to the commune. It is so strange that the modern utilitarian is mostly blind to the fitness of things, even to their stability, and he is positively a foe to beauty, which he regards as a weak element in the purpose of creation. But it was not so once. In the little corner of Umbria of which I am now writing there are samples of buildings so beautiful and so full of common sense that they give the lie to modern so-called utilitarian rubbish. It is amazing they are not copied, or anyhow that their great qualities as domestic architecture do not stimulate emulation and awaken some symptom of good taste in modern Italy. But no! The ugly is in the air even here, brought, I believe, from America and England. Italians go to America and to England, get rich or gain competence by commerce of some kind, return to Italy, and bring with them the vulgarities of both countries; these, being novelties, they imagine to be essentials, and like the Japanese, the Italians may, if they do not look out, ruin their own national art and become incompetent bastards. However, there is so much that is quite delightful in the old plan, the old design, and the old homely feeling shown in the farm dwellings in this locality, that one must not make too much of some depressing modern blots

A FARM NEAR STERPETO

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save to warn those who are responsible for them that they had better abstain from creating more, and to suggest that in the future they copy a style which is in every respect desirable and has grown up obedient to local and climatic dictation. There is a strong feeling growing among the old-fashioned and aristocratic families in Assisi against the erection of monstrous edifices in a modern commercial style wholly out of place there; so there is hope for the preservation of the beauties of a city as one of the most delightful in Europe. Discords of colour and form jar just as displeasingly upon the nerves of vision as a wrong note in a scale offends the ear. But I shall be told by advocates of anarchy and destruction, by the Futurists and others of that barbarian ilk, that an ugly thing is more beautiful than a beautiful thing. That beauty and love must be destroyed, that vice and hatred may take their place and make a Hell out of a Heaven. It is a war just now between God and the devil; I back God to win.[1] As we walk on admiringly, and a little regretfully here and there, but only passingly, we reach a secreted dell. A little stream is meandering slowly through it, half concealed by caressing foliage and wild flowers. Here upon an ancient bridge, a kind of toy one, but substantial, as all things were made in the sensible ages, we pause to partake of the shade and to rest a moment before making for that rough stony path ahead, up which no carriage can travel. Meanwhile I learned a fact or a superstition I never heard mentioned before. Hard by the bridge there grew masses of blackberries, finer I never saw save in the Morea; they were indeed tempting in the hot midday. I gathered a quantity, and, putting them into the recess of a huge wild-fig leaf, was preparing to enjoy them when my driver, a man of these parts, seized the

[1] This was written before the outbreak of war. It is appropriate.

whole bundle of nice things from me and threw them into the river. "They are poison!" "Why?" Then he took me to a bush of blackberries, and moving some leaves aside, showed me that upon the back of one of them was a kind of green beetle. "Wherever this beetle passes he leaves poison behind. So all the blackberries on these bushes are poisoned." "Do never the *contadini* children eat this fruit?" "Mai," was his answer, "they would die; it is poison." So I obeyed, as I always do upon local information of this kind, for there may be truth at the bottom of it. Well, after this episode I left the shade and the bridge to find my way up to the Rocca. We seemed to be in the very depth of the country here and quite away from habitations, but we were reminded of humans and labour presently by the pleasant sound of the loom as it was steadily worked to the song and refrain of an old peasant woman, and from recesses of foliage we heard the voices of children. Then we know we are nearing the village, but where is it? A few houses we see in gardens full of fruit, where pigs are numerous and pet lambs abound and children play, but where is Castel S. Angelo? We take a sudden turn up a rocky pathway, thickly bordered upon either side with mulberry trees and huge poisonous blackberry bushes. To the right there come into sight a high wall and portions of a tower. Abruptly turning past these to the right, and still struggling over a rough road, we find a low gateway. Through it, and we are in the fortress which, like Sterpeto, has been converted into a little town of stone houses erected closely together and built out of the debris of the fallen fortress. The walls of this small castle, which belongs still to the family of the Counts of Fiume, are circumambulated in a few minutes; then we have still to ascend that we may arrive at the piazza, now the threshing-floor of the tiny village, once no doubt a place of outlook and vantage, for the

piazza stands upon higher ground than the summit of the partially dismantled tower of the fortress. Upon this eminence is the church, flanked by a monastery of Benedictines. The key obtained from the monastery, we are accompanied by a courteous friar to the church. I said a few lines back that we should find here an echo of the voices which speak to us from the walls of the Church of St. Francis in Assisi, and verily that is the case. I do not say that there are any frescoes of first-rate merit, though there are several which display the chaste beauty of design of the Umbrian school, and there are some evidently by pupils of Giotto, while Tiberio d' Assisi may well have been the author of more than one. It may be that some careful expert will arrange the dates and discover the names of the authors of these interesting works. It may be also that a diver into history may present reliable authority for attributions (which I generally rather mistrust, however) which might justly claim for some of them a place in the ranks of primitive Umbrian art, perhaps before the Florentine Cimabue or the Pisan Giunta had found their way into Umbria. Be this so or not, there can be no doubt of the distinctive interest which this church displays for the careful connoisseur and thoughtful art historian. I do not feel qualified to give an opinion that would be worth consideration, but I suggest that the paintings in the apse may have been executed by scholars of Giotto who came on here and started upon their own account, after, or during, the decoration of St. Francis at Assisi. Much of the work is evidently from a young hand seeking to express an idea which was not merely a convention, but original as well as traditional. The monastery is now inhabited by three friars who would take in visitors not over fastidious, who would be content with simple and clean fare. The inhabitants tell me that Rocca S. Angelo is much warmer

than Assisi. No doubt it is very sheltered from the north and east winds, and, being exposed to the south and west, is comparatively benign in the winter when cold is terrific in Assisi. I can hardly imagine a more delightful retreat than the student would find in the monastery, where, being so near the church, he could study with great facility, profit, and pleasure, and perhaps tell us more than is at present known about this interesting church and its wall-paintings. The walks about the neighbourhood of Rocca S. Angelo are enchanting. In the centre of agricultural life among a people polite, civilized, and industrious, an intelligent traveller would discover much to glean from many sources of interest in this primitive corner so near as distance goes, so far as simple life is concerned from Perugia, which is swiftly modernizing and losing its austere and attractive qualities I remember so well forty-six years ago. Over the gently waving land, and upon another spur of the same range of softly moulded hills, rises the tower of San Gregorio, the most complete of the thirteenth-century castles in the Commune of Assisi, and thither we must pass on, taking on our way Tordibetto, which was a stronghold of considerable importance; now, as the others have, this has become a little village which has grown up within the old walls. For picturesque litter, circuitous and narrow ways, unexpected stairs mounting to various levels, and for the extraordinary beauty of the children who, timid or bold, surrounded me in their curiosity as I drew, Tordibetto is more remarkable than Rocca S. Angelo, though there is no church of any interest, nor is there any art of any sort or kind except the best of all, of God's make. The position occupied by the fortress is striking. It commands an extensive view, and, if the approach was well protected by scouts, it must indeed have proved a difficult stronghold to lay siege to. In Tordibetto there are signs

TORDIBETO

Thirteenth-century Fortress, now a small Town

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of the use of cannon. As a place of defence it appears to have been in service longer than the other castles, excepting perhaps San Gregorio, which is some three or four miles further on towards Castel d'Arno. Leaving Tordibetto, the road descends towards the plain to the banks of the Chiasscio, a fine river which waters the land between the higher grounds where the ancient fortresses stand and proud Perugia rising upon the southern side. The Chiasscio winds about as the Meander does in the Peloponnesus, hence it is a most valuable and extensive irrigator. The land of the plain through which it takes its slow course is highly productive, not only for farm and grazing land, but for the many trees which feed their roots in the well-moistened earth, and abound in quantity, size, and species upon the gradual slopes from the higher levels to the river-bed, and are growing in luxury on the very edge of the stream. These woods enclosing portions of the river bring in a new fancy to the landscape, something northern, something which reminds one of the "Denes" in Northumberland. In the afternoon, when the sun is low in the west, the broad river receives a sheet of direct light, making a silver passage in the fruitful plain and quite a new one, a marked variation upon the aspect of the country only a mile or so eastwards, where the plain is waterless save for clever irrigation. Soon after, the road has nearly touched the river, and passes beside it, where rushes and canes grow out of the flat shallows; presently the road begins to rise, then to twist round little hills, mostly of ploughland, but in the hollow between which flourishes in luxury every kind of tree that loves water, fed by tiny little tributaries of the great river. It was fortunate that at the season I was there last it was ploughing time. Mighty oxen, perhaps bred at Bevagna, have to be employed to drag the plough, making a deep furrow for the maize upon slopes which are getting towards the perpen-

dicular, inclines that we know naught of in England. So exhausting is this labour to man and beast that no more than for two hours can they be employed; a fresh team and a fresh ploughman have to be brought in, if such are at hand, or the labour can only be continued for two hours out of the twenty-four, unless it is performed before the sun is up or in the later afternoons. It is an incredibly fine sight. The furrows have to be deep to receive maize, the earth has to be turned to the depth of eighteen inches or two feet. The soil in August is baked into lumps which nearly approach the hardness of limestone. It is not difficult to imagine, then, the labour for man and beast to turn this soil upon a steep slope. It is greatest labour for both upon the down-hill run, when the weight is against the yoke. For the ploughman the labour is grievous. He has to release the plough from the rut at each pull of the oxen, who can never command a direct long drag. They have to be arrested almost every moment lest the ploughshare shall dig so deeply that it can only be released with extreme difficulty. Every sinew and muscle is fully active. Using as much restraining as propelling force, these huge beasts tremble with exertion. One cord held loosely in the ploughman's hand manages them, but only partly, for the ploughman's voice and his various calls are known to the oxen, who instantly obey. I had often seen ploughing in land of somewhat the same character outside Siena, but never before had I witnessed such trenchant labour, because of the steepness of the sides of the small hills, and hence the enormous obligatory exertion employed in the sudden change of levels. It is no wonder then that neither man nor beast can continue such labour for any length of time. It was getting towards sunset when I first saw this fine sight, one that I hope to register in colour. But we must get on with our journey. As we proceed along the road, and as it ascends towards

San Gregorio, the character of the country changes again, vines and fig-trees prevail, but untrained and uncut. The vines grow from tree to tree in delightful confusion, grapes are flourishing high up or low down, among the leaves of cherry-trees or almost lying on the ground. Gourds and melons, cucumbers and marrows, are in a tangle hither and thither over the ground, while the flat threshing-floors in the vicinity of immaculate farm buildings are richly adorned with pyramidal hay-ricks and corn-stacks, and carpeted with golden maize-heads ripening in the sun. One of such farms as I describe is approached before the last corner is reached which leads to San Gregorio. Here a well-to-do peasant family lives in what seems to me the noblest simplicity. I know they are not rich, but I know they are happy. It is a goodly family of charming old people, vigorous middle-aged workers, and delightful maidens who gave me their pretty confidence and permitted me to drive them to and fro to their milking and other country duties. We became friends. It was charming to listen to their prattle, to encourage their curiosity, to hear their love stories. Theocritus would have made an idyll out of the pleasant good-fellowship, gay without familiarity, between the northern Saxon and the sunburnt children of ancient Umbria. One day the family had gone to Petrignano to the Fair there. It came towards evening when the low sun made a gold and diamond atmosphere out of dust and mist after the hot day, and I was making a drawing in the shade of an old fig-tree. There were merry voices sounding from the valley not far off; they came nearer, and with them appeared the whole family of my friends. It was a rich harvest they had acquired. Gay ribbons from the pedlar, who is still an important item at the Italian Fair, new kerchiefs for next Sunday's head-dress for Mass, but other and more important, two lambs which the

girls bustled along, and one snow-white calf, partly driven, partly led, by another maiden from San Gregorio. Then came the elders with baskets deftly planted upon their heads, so poised, so adjusted, that a strong wind would scarce tell upon their equilibrium. My cart and horse stood waiting not far off; my girl friends accepted places therein, and it was a tight fit. We got the calf into the body of the cart, while we others squatted like Arabs upon the opposite seats, and the girls squeezed themselves into the box-seat beside old Checco (one of the lambs had been accommodated under Checco's seat), he who always drove me, a merry companion and a real wag, who entered into the fun with the enthusiasm of a boy, who knew everybody on the road, and was an admirable chatterbox, and so we drove merrily through the sunset time and the deeply laden lanes till we reached the snug little homestead. The elder people came in later, and we made merry that evening, and it was near midnight before I got back to Assisi, after having extracted a promise from the young ladies that they would accompany me the following day to San Gregorio. And then came the time for questions—who gave me my rings? who gave me that pretty carbuncle stud? how old was I? "An old man, yes"; but I must have had a mother; did she come also from the dark land of England where it is all fog and black, and there is seldom sunshine? The joy, the enthusiasm arrived to them when I told them that I had a son born in Assisi who was called "Checco"; then there was a cry of delight, hands clapped, and I was accepted as a real "Cristiano" and fellow-countryman. One of the girls, and a real Umbrian beauty, had a lover who was fighting in Tripoli, another had her brother there. "They would return safe and sound, for the Madonna would care for them for the sake of the Ave Marias we sing, and so many of them, all day as we work." But one was silent and

SAN GREGORIO

Thirteenth-century Fortress

(*By permission of J. F. Cheetham, Esq.*)

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looked sad. "Where is your lover, Serafina?" "I have none, I am a bastard, so no one will marry me!" and in a degree what she said is true. There is shyness of love-children among these primitive people who are pure in their lives and respect themselves and retain some superstition that an accident or moral misfortune will taint a generation and defile a whole family. It was a busy day upon the great threshing-stage at San Gregorio. Gourds had to be turned to the sun, fresh hay had been gathered up from the valley, the second crop had to be brought up to the drier and more sunny position of the high ground. I was drawing all day in this most romantic place, which well might make the centre of a tale. A tale perhaps of contrast and of similarity between the thirteenth and the twentieth centuries, for unlike though they be in some degree and respects here in the old feudal castle in appearance, there is great similarity between the old, which has not changed with the centuries, and the new life. The same loves, sorrows, joys, the same labour, the same religion, and more, the same vigorous simplicity of daily life and labour, reign nobly in such out-of-the-way corners of the world as this. It is a splendid lesson. Man, as he was made to toil, to bring the earth under his will, keeps pure as animals are pure; he has no town vices the worst of all. This outdoor life *is* purifying, and it is *not* monotonous. The childlike joy, aye, also the joy of freedom which animals feel is denied the town liver, who is the artificial product of a gradual growth towards an unhinging, unsatisfying civilization which modern people *are* feeling though they do not know why. And here that sweeter purer life of the soil is led, and I confess to envying those that lead it. San Gregorio is a city within itself; it is the most extensive of the castles, as it is the last in the confines of Assisi before the boundary is found which divides Assisi from Perugia. The

great watch-tower stands in its mediæval majesty. The deep gateway is as it was in the thirteenth century. The castle stands upon an eminence triangular in form ; the apex of it points towards Perugia. The walls in plan fit the eminence. Immediately below them, upon two sides of a triangle, are valleys abruptly descending till they merge into the plain. Facing Perugia is the chief tower of outlook in the south-west direction. The entrance-tower is to the east towards Assisi. There can be no doubt of the strategical importance of this place, and it must have proved difficult to assault with success. San Gregorio would meet the first onslaught into Assisan territory from Perugia. While San Gregorio dominated the extreme western side of the plain it was liable to sudden attack from the outlying fortresses in the Republic of Perugia, Castel d'Arno, Ripa, and S. Egidio. That Perugia is not far distant is evident. From San Gregorio Perugia can so clearly be made out that, with the aid of a telescope, its inhabitants can be seen as they walk upon its high walls. Being of so great importance as an outpost place of defence, San Gregorio took a conspicuous part in mediæval history, and here I may remind my readers that should they wish to know, I believe, all that is known about it in that connection, Cristofani's *Storia d'Assisi* will communicate it, but I fear the book has not been translated into English. As are the other castles, so San Gregorio is a little township of perhaps two hundred people, certainly there are no more, and entirely agricultural. Some own land and work it, others are in the employ of landowners with whom they share equally, bad and good years making no difference in regard to division of funds. It is in the centre of highly productive land which is still farmed in the old-fashioned manner. Retaining its primitive character in a marked degree, San Gregorio is as unsophisticated a place as though it were still under the rule of

CASTEL SANT' ANGELO

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the thirteenth century. So little have fashion and change invested it with any newness either of spirit or matter. Of all places within easy reach of Assisi, it and the country about is the most attractive; indeed I would like to build myself a little house there with *loggie* and a lookout tower, keep a donkey-cart, and farm on the old methods, and only so; no American iron ploughs should vulgarize or make short cuts to farming, but good sensible primitive methods which suit the country and climate, and suit the people, these I would use. I would have a common room for the *contadini*, who would be my friends, as well as dependents for wages. Alas, there are dreams, and I fear this is one of them, which can never come into active service, sweet and pleasant though they be to encourage. And this is one of mine in my old age, to go, shall I say, back to the land, no it would not be that, but to achieve a healthy life and a man's work in it, following the plough, and be as Horace was, intimate with the soil and with all graceful nature, putting on one's best clothes in the evening and then playing at being an advanced civilized gentleman; drawing and writing about *the real life*. I believe the people who live at San Gregorio, and much in this fashion, but not playing at being gentlemen, are very happy. Though their literary instincts are nil, they have fellowship with Mother Earth, they know the seasons, are friends with them as well as fighting with them, understanding what each can give in its measure and quality to make up the great whole of the year's products, to render the earth fertile, and provide life with a continuous quiet and deep interest. It would seem to be enough. Do the people feel all this? Do they know what they have got and estimate it? Zola and the materialists will tell us, no! They will have it that the country folk are degraded, are like animals, and partake of their manners, being verily only other kinds of beasts. I have been

much with country folk in Italy ; I see in them nothing degraded. They are really in a high estate, and not degraded from one. They are the Adams and Eves of a new garden. Their faults are those which are natural to the youth of the world, whose mental aptitudes are directed only in a slight degree by conscious reasonings, whose instincts are vigorous and strong and not always what is called refined. But their hearts are good, if rough-hewn, their generosity extreme. Their religion is superstitious and almost wholly pagan, but it is a real thing to them, as it was to the plebs of Rome ; it does influence their conduct far more than it is generally supposed to do by people who mix with them more in books than in reality, and who may be prejudiced against pagan practices which have survived from very ancient times and form a part of unwritten creeds among the written ones, which are just primitive myths turned into literature. Woven together of the old and the new, Pagan and Christian, is formed a kind of anthropomorphic natural religion, absolutely essential to primitive people, which has grown to be an indispensable agent in forming their daily life and happiness and in preserving their character, and this survives. Such, briefly, are the people who have taken the places of the ancient rich folk, who, though labourers only, but of very ancient blood, inherit much of the spirit and tendencies of their ancestors. And be it remembered that until quite lately, so lately as to be in my memory, the people of this corner in Umbria did not migrate or emigrate, they remained on the land which had been tilled by their forefathers. They are remnants of noble families, perchance, and were their antecedents known, it would be proved that ancient and blue blood flows in their veins unsullied by much interchange, and preserved direct and pure from generation to generation, in which sense they are aristocrats. With reluctance I bid adieu to San

Gregorio, but not until the sun had set his golden tints upon the great fortress, upon the great flat level of the threshing-floor, and the conical stacks of hay and straw were glittering like metal, silver, copper, and gold under his dying rays, to be hidden presently behind plum-tinted hills. A kind and merry conclave of my friends collected to wish me God-speed. Checco harnessed the slow-going horse, and not without some reluctance. He knew our many days at San Gregorio had come to an end, and it might be long ere he found another patron who had fallen in love with San Gregorio. So then there came the good-bye, the "Dio la guarda," and the many courteous expressions so gracefully tendered in the language of all most rich in them. In the twilight we went silently back to Assisi. But, though we made several excursions to other castles, to Ripa, to S. Egidio, to Castellano and Castel d'Arno, all in their way delightful and interesting, both Checco and I looked up from the plain to the towers of San Gregorio with a certain fondness which had become unique and undivided. What made it so I cannot tell; it was a kind of everything, indescribable peace, genial company of men and women, vines and fig-trees, while all nature seemed to lay herself out to make each day more lovable than the last had been. And though I could go on writing more, much more, I seem now to have reached a kind of climax; and I like now to lay aside my pen and to leave my readers in the atmosphere, if I have in any way presented it, of the sweetest spot in the commune of Assisi, one of the least spoilt in the most old-world I know of in ancient Umbria, where Francis' presence lingers, where perchance his soul is hovering and protecting his bride of "Poverty."

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